Strange Ties

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Strange Ties

by NadoHunter

Summary

America finds out that he's in fact not the youngest country, Its Germany, which starts Alfred on a new quest to make Ludwig his best friend.
Russia and Italy suddenly have a strange developing jealousy they relate on.

So strange ties begin, what do you do when you realize you wish someone was hanging out with you instead of 'them'?

Notes

Yes, I'm writing Hetalia fanfiction in 2021, here we GO scrubs. Back down to hell. I was craving some itager and rusame slow burn, so here we are.

It Begins

It all started with a simple fact, and an argument with England, as a lot of things in Alfred's life seemed to.

"Would you stop lecturing me and let me figure shit out myself? Just 'cause I'm the youngest member of the G7 doesn't mean I need you baby-ing me." Alfred bit at England.

What was this guy's problem anyway? How many times was he going to have to tell old-man-caterpillar-brows to get off his back?

"Well for one, you're not the youngest, and you act far more immature than they do, so take some responsibility!" England snapped back.

America was strongly considering ignoring the idea they weren't supposed to be fighting and grabbing the annoying Brit and tossing him out the window because that bitch was empty… *yeet*. But his thoughts of yeeting were yeeted promptly by him thinking over what England had just said.

"I'm…. not the youngest??" America questioned. He needed to get clarification.

For all he knew England was hallucinating about some magic… fairy.. pirate… thing and not a real country. Fairy pirates… could he make a movie out of that? Wait no, shit, there's already a tinkerbell movie about fairy pirates or something wasn't there? Yep, dropping that idea, no getting sued by Disney.

"Of course not!" England replied before, to America's woe, began getting an incredibly smug look on his face. "What?? You don't *know*?"

"WOT youuuU don't KnoW?" America mocked. "Know *what*? Just tell me and don't get all stupid about it, I don't keep tabs on everyone's history."

"Germany, obviously. He wasn't unified until 1871. Your own…. …. *I n d e p e n d a n ce*... in 1776*"* England choked out the word with a lot of strain that made Alfred roll his eyes. "Predates that, and of course I found your sorry ass *far* before that."

"Yeah, I know when I was born, thanks for reminding me, couldn't have remembered my own ***birth*** without you." Alfred snipped. England seriously knew how to make him see red sometimes. "can't believe you 'as you know'-ed my own history."

"You asked you dolt!"

"About the *youngest* country not about myself!" He paused, mind already wandering from being mad. "So huh… really… Germany is that much younger than me? He doesn't look it… is that bad to say? Is he sensitive about that?"

“Yes, he’s much younger than you, really puts that maturity of yours, or rather your lack of it, into perspective, hmmm?” England said smugly.

But America was already ignoring him lost in thought and wandering away, not listening to England’s screeching and yells of annoyance about him being “rude” as he did. Germany was really that much younger than him this whole time? And here he thought him and Germany would never have anything to relate on! It also kind of made him a little sad, Germany was that young and always looked so stressed and hardened! Dude needed to learn how to relax and have fun! Act his age!

“Hey! I could be like the mentor for once!” Alfred thought with glee.

With that, Alfred F. Jones officially had his new mission in mind. Operation: Make me and Germany best buds and get that stiff dude to act his age!

Germany was silently tired as usual, however he was also quietly listening to Italy prattle on to him about every little thing he had done that week, from meals he cooked to things he had seen, as well as random conversations he had. Even if he sometimes seemed to look annoyed, he liked hearing Italy talk, he really did.

However as he gathered his papers, and organized his notes before packing them away carefully, world meeting now concluded, a new presence entered on his left side. Before he could turn to see who it was, the wind was knocked out of him from a hand being slapped jovially on his back, and he wheezed, Italy letting out an odd noise of panic as the scene occurred.

“Hey! Germany! My man, my home-slice, compadre, bro-lio!” America chirped happily, seemingly unaware of the damage he just caused.

“A-Ah America…” He straightened, trying to look as not-bothered as possible, was this going to leave a bruise on his back? It would heal quickly, but still. “What is it you need?”

“I just realized the craziest thing and totally didn’t have to be told about it!”

Ludwig grimaced as the overly friendly American had one arm put around his shoulders now casually, leaning forward to look at Germany with a bright sunny grin.

“Oh?” Germany asked with a sigh.

“I realized your like totally younger than me, isn’t that wild? Especially when you dress like an old man!” He cheered with a laugh.

“Er… yes…” Germany grumbled, not liking the idea of America being smug about his age.

He paused. “What do you mean “like an old man”??” Germany accused, a little insulted.

“Hang on, Germany, you’re younger than America??” Italy asked, looking up at Germany in confusion.

Germany coughed. America took the opportunity to be a little smug. “pfft whaaaat? You didn’t *know*? That’s like… *sooooo* embarrassing dude.”

“It’s true Italy… and the reason I don’t look so young is because my body existed beforehand, but *I* didn’t, or at least I don’t remember anything prior to being “Germany”. Does that make sense?”

Germany was a little anxious as Italy stared at him blankly and slowly nodded. For once he felt like he was completely unable to read his friend, it made him wonder if maybe he said something wrong somehow…

He was shaken out of his train of thought by America’s voice. “But man, we have so much to catch up on!”

“We do?” Germany asked nervously.

“Yeah!” Germany was met with a sincere, bright, excited gaze. “Because you’re like *me*! And I thought *none* of ya’ll were like me” He paused, looked away and straightened his glasses. “Not that I didn’t know, mind you.”

So America had also likely just found out. Germany huffed, wondering who informed him. Likely England in an attempt to act above America in one of his “I used to rule the world you know” moments. Old habits died hard it seemed.

However now this meant America would want to talk to him more… which, he supposed he liked America well enough, it was extended conversation about things he hadn’t even confronted, which made him nervous.

“So how about it? Ready to hang out new buddy?”

“Ri-right now?” Germany stammered.

“Haha… actually me and Germany were going to…” Italy began quietly before being interrupted.

“Oh my god you totally read my mind; we can absolutely hang out right now!” He cheered, pretending he didn’t know ‘right now’ had been a question.

“Bu-“ Germany tried to protest. Italy was right, they *were* supposed to leave together…

“Glad that was easy, lets get out of this stuffy meeting room!” America cheered, Germany only barely able to grab his briefcase and look apologetically at Italy before being dragged out by the wrist.

How the hell was America just able to decide and act on these things so quickly?

And so it seemed, began his strange friendship with America.

Challenge

Chapter Summary

Germany won't back down from a challenge, he's no chicken, that's for sure.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Germany wasn't sure what America was planning to do with him on this "hang out", however he had an impending sense of dread.

"America, where are you planning on taking me?" Germany sputtered as he was tugged along down the hall.

"I don't know dude! Let's just *go*, it's a nice day! We should just go with the flow, ya know?" America replied with a grin.

Germany's eye twitched in clear annoyance for the lack of planning or direction. "If you haven't noticed, we're both in suits? We *just* came off of a meeting? How many places are there to go when your dressed up for business? You should at least have some sort of plan!"

Alfred slowed down and paused in the middle of the hall before turning around. "Easy dude! We just dress down!"

Dress down?? What did that mean?

Germany watched, startled as America took off his coat, untying his tie and unbuttoning his suit. Was he planning on stripping in the middle of the hall?! He looked around in a panic, seemed the only one around was Russia standing ominously at the end of the hall. He didn't realize France had *that* much of an impact on America!

"What do you think you're doing?!" Germany accused, only to look back and find….

America was just untucking and lightly unbuttoning the shirt that… literally everyone wore under their suit and was just shrugging his bomber jacket back on and looking at Germany like he was insane.

Germany certainly felt a little insane.

"What did you *think* I was doing?" Alfred asked with an amused smirk.

"I thought… I thought you were going to pull a *France*." He admitted while biting the inside of his cheek a little.

America threw his head back and laughed. “What, is it either suits or naked with you dude?”

Germany turned even more red. “N-No! I just! I thought! I don’t!” He tried to explain.

“I should have figured you for a guy that would need help just knowing how to *dress* relaxed.”

“I KNOW HOW TO DRESS RELAXED!” Germany snapped back, absolutely not relaxed in the slightest.

America just snorted. “Yeah, okay, whatever you say Mr. Potato head. Stand still and let the hero help you.”

Dear god, now what was this strange man with the energy of a golden retriever planning?

Suddenly he was tugged forward by the tie, only to have it loosened and pulled away, and for America to start whistling as he casually unbuttoned Germany’s suit like this was just something normal and not strange at all.

“You! Don’t just..! What if someone sees and gets the wrong idea?” Germany hissed.

America looked up and raised an eyebrow. “Huh? OH” He grinned as he still just yanked Ludwig’s suit jacket off. “Right, “no homo bro” Is that what you wanted to confirm?”

Ludwig wanted to send this man into the sun, or potentially burry himself in the ground, he wasn’t sure which one he wanted more.

“We can keep our stuff in my car for now.” Alfred said practically as Germany grumbled. “Seriously though man, you should relax!”

“So far you are the opposite of relaxing.” Germany lectured, massaging the spot between his eyebrows that Italy often also teased him for not relaxing.

“*Your face is going to get stuck that way if you’re always making such a grumpy expression, come on, smile for me Germany!”*

He remembered Italy encouraging him like that… he had shrugged him off at the time, but it *was* a pleasant memory.

Suddenly there was a hand on his head ripping his hair from its orderly state.

“H-Hey!” Germany tried to shove America’s hand off, but it was too late, his hair was now a mess.

“See! There you go, you already look less like an old man!” America congratulated himself over Germany’s hair now being disheveled and out of place.

“Would you stop calling me an old man?” Germany said, speeding up to catch up with America who had already started marching onward again expecting the other man to follow.

“Oh right, you’re the baby among us right?” America said with a teasing grin.

Ludwig grumbled, this troublesome man and his teasing, he was reminding him of his *brother*. Except these days when he thought about his brother he got melancholy.

“I am not! There are at least 15 countries younger than me.” He defended. “Just because I’m the youngest in the G7…”

However he felt trapped. Because ‘there are younger countries’ felt like a weak argument to use against America at the moment.

“I’m only teasin’, don’t worry” America replied with his signature smile.

He soon found himself begrudgingly entering America’s vehicle with him, still a bit baffled on how this happened. He took a moment to check his phone, wondering if he should text Italy and give him an extra apology for their plans being interrupted… but then again… Italy was friendly with everyone wasn’t he? He probably would not be worried about it as much as he would be if Italy was the one being dragged away…

He sighed. He really needed to stop thinking of Italy so much. What did he really expect from their dynamic anyway? Italy was his best friend, nothing more. Thinking there were feelings on Italy’s part was his mistake, he wouldn’t be humiliated by such things again.

He looked over at America.

Well… even if this man was troublesome, his brother *had* encouraged him to “make more friends”, and being on Alfred’s good side wasn’t a bad thing. If the man wanted to hang out, maybe he should follow his advice and… “go with the flow.”

“Oh! I know where we can go, I know this great café with an outdoor patio, cause man oh man is it coffee time, and they have the *best* desserts.” Alfred suggested happily, already taking off down the road.

“The *best?*” Ludwig asked. “Hmph, I’ll be the judge of that.”

“Ohohoho, fancy yourself an expert?” Alfred teased.

“Well…” Ludwig began, wondering if he should admit his interest in baking to America yet.

“That’s right though! German sweets are pretty good!” America suddenly chirped.

“Really? You think so?” Germany asked calmly.

“Yeah man! German chocolate cake is one of my faves!”

Germany sighed. “America, you realize German Chocolate Cake is not actually German, yes?”

America looked authentically crestfallen. “What?? Nooo why would it be called German chocolate then??”

“It’s named after Sam German, who is either an American or Britishman, in 1852.” Germany explained.

“*Sam German*. What the hell dude. I mean hell I know French fries aren’t French but now I’m kind of wondering if they were invented by some dude named like… I don’t know, Jimmy French.” Alfred pondered.

“*Jimmy French*.” Ludwig repeated.

“Dr. Jekyll and Mr. French.” Alfred said randomly after a solid 5 minutes of silence.

“…Why… What… What… Are you talking about?” Ludwig asked, brain failing to continue processing anything more that came out of America’s mouth.

“I have no clue dude.”

Seems America didn’t know what he was talking about anymore either. Really, what a ridiculous man.

Russia had been waiting for the optimum moment to pick on America after the meeting, only to have found America completely preoccupied in removing clothing from both himself and Germany. He hadn’t heard of Germany and America forming any sort of relationship before…

Were they actually close? Had America already made more friends?

It had Ivan’s mind wandering between annoyed and melancholy. America was such a new country in the grand scheme of things, and he just seemed to make friends so fast! What was America doing so easily that he couldn’t? He always seemed to scare new friends away.

He then saw Italy coming out of the meeting in a strangely melancholy mood for a country with such a warm climate. Of course! He was always around Germany, wasn’t he? Maybe he would know more about this situation.

A simple interrogation would be in order. So he walked over, yet despite the fact he wasn’t trying to be hidden, he seemed to still startle the Italian with his presence.

“Привет Italy!” He greeted, putting on his most friendly face. “I saw Germany take off with America! I did not know they were such good friends! I found them removing clothing in hallway, they must be very close!” He asked, innocently recounting what he witnessed.

Italy seemed to have trouble processing this information. “They… wha… no! No way they have that kind of relationship!”

“Oh dear… this is news to you. I am thinking by your reaction its upsetting news as well?” He asked, concern in his eyes that this may crush his new Italian friend’s spirit.

“I just mean! Germany is my best friend, he would have told me if something was going on between him and America!” He insisted.

“Would he?”

Ivan was genuinely asking, but this seemed to sow seeds of doubt into the Italian’s mind. Maybe he could do something to offer comfort.

“Well no matter! This gives room for us to be friends now!” He said happily, clapping his hand on Italy’s shoulder, mimicking the gesture that America seemed to do. Perhaps if he mimicked America’s attitude, he could make friends too.

“Ahahah… yeah… f-f-friends!” Italy stuttered.

Italy was practically shaking with excitement! This would be a great new friendship; Ivan could tell already. Besides, Italy had already given him great friend advice in past with giving a gift you would want to a friend! This could work out! Without Germany hovering over Italy, this could be a great opportunity.

“So then I told stupid England to take a flying leap!” America said proudly.

Germany was watching the man who had just downed a large order of double espresso like it was water. No wonder he had so much energy. His blood had to be nothing but caffeine at this rate! He wondered if Coffee was to America like Vodka was to Russia.

“Your attitude towards England doesn’t seem to improve, does it?” Germany observed.

“The guy likes trying to boss me around, it pisses me off.” Alfred took another bite of his cake. “He wasn’t there for me when I actually needed him for ages, practically ditched me, then has the nerve to act like he *owns* me and be all mad I wanted to be independent.” He ranted.

Germany tilted his head. He didn’t know much about America’s revolution from England outside of the fact that… well… it had happened. He knew some bits from his brother bragging about how “America gets his awesome strength and amazing skills from my great teaching!!” but he always took what his brother said with a grain of salt ever since he was still in the body of a child and his brother had convinced him many scary fairy tales were real. Maybe it had been out of a desire to keep him safe, but really, it had just made Germany not want to leave his room for quite a while.

He also noticed America's eating sped up a little when talking about his past, as if he was trying to force himself not to talk about it.

"I suppose he has a hard time wrapping his head around the fact you grew up so quickly. At least it has to be quick to him. My brother sometimes will still talk to me like I'm little, even if he means well." He related quietly.

America seemed to perk up and scoot forward. "That's why I wanted to talk to you… you grew up really fast too, huh? Way faster than me even…"

Germany slowly nodded. "For as long as I can remember, people always looked at me as if they expected great things of me, and I didn't know why."

America had finished his cake, and was now rolling the crumbs on his plate around with his fork. "Yeah its like… kind of unfair, ya know, they all got ages and ages to figure it out, but we didn't. We just had to leap right into it and were expected to be a certain way already. Finding out your younger than me… was a bit of a shock. There's a bunch of other countries that rely on you… do you ever… resent that?"

Ludwig paused, confusing emotions passing through him as he looked at America peering through his glasses up at him nervously. His knee was bouncing, he was fiddling with the zipper on his coat. He had always known America to be boastful and arrogant, so seeing an authentic introspective side and a *loneliness* in him was baffling… and yet…

America was right… the other countries *couldn't* relate to their situation. Sure, they had all been through so much, some of the things in Italy's history… he couldn't figure out how Italy managed to stay so happy go lucky, and he could never fully blame Russia for being a little… off… given the amount of revolutions and misery involved in his history.

He realized, as he thought over America's question… that he'd almost been on auto-pilot for a long time. He'd never considered his own feelings before. Whenever his feelings did come up, he shoved them aside.

"I'm not really important, I have to do my job…" Germany found himself saying. "Or… rather my feelings aren't important." He corrected.

"That's bull! You shouldn't have to! All of them should have their own stuff figured out by now and figure out on their own how to get along. I'm mad at myself even for all the times you've intervened between me and Russia. Like… just cause your capable doesn't mean you should *have* to be the responsible one. And saying something like that… like you don't matter… that's… that's not okay."

Germany turned a little red. He wasn't expecting such a passionate outburst, it left him a little speechless.

America suddenly looked resolute. He leaned forward firmly, placing his arms on the table in front of him and putting his head on top of his folded hands like he was ready to play a game of chess. "I dare you, double dog dare you, to stop intervening and being 'the responsible

one', and see what happens. Its not fair you should have to be a rock for everyone else. Let go and let them figure themselves out."

Despite the slightly childish use of "double dog dare", Ludwig was struck by how *serious* Alfred looked. This had *really* struck a cord with him? He hadn't had anyone tell him he could be doing something wrong by being a rock before.

He thought about it. What would it be like if he let go and had fun sometimes like America seemed to be fine with doing? It wasn't as if they all had *that* much say in what happened in their own countries despite having to do work for them and literally being personifications of them…

Maybe it did feel a little unfair, sometimes… what *would* it be like to not work so hard? Maybe even be a little… *selfish?*

"I wouldn't know where to start, I've never "acted my age", frankly, I don't… always know what my identity is outside of work." He admitted.

America grinned again and put his hand on Germany's shoulder. "Just stick with me, I'll be the hero-mentor and show you how to chillax and have fun! And when everyone starts fighting at meetings, just let them burn themselves out and do whatever you want while they're distracted!"

Germany furrowed his brows, nearly lecturing himself for even considering America's 'challenge'. "What do you do when everyone is distracted usually?"

America shrugged. "Depends, sometimes I'll doodle, play a game on my phone… sometimes I'll sneak in a mobile game system since I know everyone is gonna go ham at some point. Used to be my Gameboy, but of course it's a switch nowadays." He explained. "I also have this infinity cube thing that I fidget with sometimes. You know it actually *helps* me focus, but smelly old England has tried to take it from me."

He pulled said "infinity cube" out of his pocket, Ludwig looked at it curiously, and became mesmerized as Alfred rolled it in his hand. He could see why such a thing may be relaxing.

"Hrmm… well if it helps you I don't see what the problem is. Aren't there plenty of people who need such things?" He asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Yeah, England is just an old man about some stuff. So not to worry dude, even if you act kind of old-man-ish, England will forever be the most old-man-like old man!" He encouraged.

"Er… thank you… I think."

"So, you going to take me up on my challenge?" America asked, leaning back on his seat.

Germany bit his lip. Maybe if nothing else, this could be an interesting experiment? And he had to admit… it was *nice* relating to another young country, even if he had previously thought him and America couldn't relate on anything.

“…I accept your challenge.” He confirmed seriously.

“Hell yeah dude! You won’t regret it!”

Well… they’d see about that.

Chapter End Notes

High key its fun being able to be a little silly with my writing :D

Friendly

Chapter Summary

Day one of "Project Germany attempting to not intervene" We'll see how this first experiment goes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"So everyone is like, yeah Batman would totally win because he can *prepare*, but like… what's he supposed to do about laser vision? Huh? Superman would pummel him." Alfred chattered on.

Ludwig hummed. He was beginning to not mind America prattling on about his interests, in fact he was almost impressed. Even if it was over things, he would have thought frivolous at first, he had a surprising amount of in-depth opinions about the topics he chose.

"Why would they even fight in the first place?" Ludwig countered.

Alfred's mouth opened then closed, before he put his hands on his head. "D u d e, your so right! Why would they fight? They're like besties!"

Ludwig didn't know much about what Alfred was talking about, but he was glad he had somehow managed to make a good point.

"So anyway what are you into?" America suddenly asked.

Ludwig nearly choked on his sip of water. "Er… me?" He coughed.

Alfred nodded genuinely and curiously.

What… *was* he into? Baking for sure… and… actually all of his interests he was a little embarrassed by, particularly when it came to America, but… well, America had been friendly up to this point, so maybe he'd take a little risk.

"I like… baking."

"Oh sick dude, you really are a dessert expert then!" Alfred said happily. Ludwig couldn't help but smile. Alfred really was like a puppy dog, he could very easily imagine a tail wagging behind him in excitement, he even seemed to wiggle the same way dogs did when excited. It was endearing.

“Well, I wouldn’t call myself an *expert*. I’m not very good at decorating, my hands are… clumsy…”

“Really? Huh. Well hey! Taste is what matters most right? You’ll have to make me something sometime!” Alfred replied.

“Hmm… maybe I will.”

“Okay okay.” Alfred wiggled in his seat and began bouncing his leg again. “So Baking, what else?”

Germany turned a bit red and scratched the back of his neck. “…Westerns*.”

Alfred’s eyes immediately lit up. “Westerns? Like! My westerns? Cowboy westerns??”

Ludwig tried to look away as his face heated up even more. “Yea… I think cowboys are…” He cleared his throat. “*Interesting*. I enjoy watching such things. The concept is very popular in my country.”

“Now that I think about it, I think Texas gets a lot of German tourists…” He beamed at Germany. “Wow! Really?! Really really?”

“Er, Yes, Really Really.”

“Well shoot! I’m so flattered! Also you’ve given me even more ideas of stuff we can do together!”

Ludwig calmed himself, the embarrassment from admitting his interests subsiding. “That sounds… fun.” He admitted.

He was a bit curious to see what Alfred would show him given this new knowledge.

“Oh, and I like football… soccer for you Americans, I play it with Italy a lot.” He added, beginning to sip at his water again.

Alfred hummed, tilting his head a little bit as he thought for a moment. “So… what is your relationship with Italy? Are you two like..?” Alfred crossed his fingers to give an example and Ludwig once again nearly spit out his drink. Maybe he shouldn’t take sips when its Alfred’s turn to talk.

“He’s… no he’s just my close friend. Nothing else.” He said plainly.

“…Do you wish it was something else?”

Ludwig grumbled, feeling defensive. “No! I’m not… I’m not… I don’t like men like that… and especially not Italy.” He said, blatantly lying.

Alfred narrowed his eyes, unconvinced. “Hey, look, I get it if you’re not that comfy with me yet, and it’s okay if you *are* and you don’t want to be *out*, but just so you know, if you *did* like men, you’d get no judgement from me. It’s the 20’s 2.0 dude, I’m pan, I like guys, gals,

non-binary pals… its okay to just be yourself. Even though I know history hasn't always been kind and it's not perfect now."

Ludwig stiffened under Alfred's words. Wondering how he was able to be so confident in himself just like that. He still didn't know exactly *what* he'd qualify himself as. It was another thing he shoved to the side.

"… I don't understand my own feelings."

"Fair enough."

"I wanted to ask Russia out for the longest time, but I mean, you know, he's Russia. I tried dropping some hints during the cold war, but we all know how that went." Alfred mused, lazily drawing his finger through some water that had formed from one of the cold cups sitting on the table.

Germany sputtered at this new information. "You… Russia?" He asked stupidly.

"Yeah… you know we may fight but I think he's been one of the only older countries that actually talks to me like an equal."

Ludwig furrowed his brows. America seemed to have a lot of sore spots around feeling listened to, maybe some of his seemingly ridiculous proposals during meetings and boisterous nature had something to do with that feeling? Maybe he had been too hard on America in past… he was beginning to understand him a lot more, that was for sure. He also sort of understood the feeling of trying to overcompensate for others looking down on you… it was why he had gotten so cold and tough…

"…Thank you for dragging me out with you Alfred." Ludwig said sincerely. "This has been and enlightening experience."

"Hey! Your welcome dude. But uh… your sooooo formal, remember, chillaaaaax dude!" He said with a grin while giving Ludwig a "rock on" symbol with one hand.

"Er… Oh… right….Uh…" What should he even say???

Alfred sat up. "Alright buddy, I'll help you here. Don't worry." He teased.

Just give a simple "Thanks man" and a fistbump and your good!

Ludwig looked down at his hand awkwardly. "Okay… um…"

"Thanks… man…" He said, awkwardly pushing his fist against Alfred's and pulling it away.

"Good start." Alfred praised with a wink.

Ludwig shook his head, but couldn't help but smile contently despite the long, strange day.

Italy was a bit embarrassed at how many times he had checked his phone that night. He couldn't even take his normal nap because he'd end up rolling over and checking yet again that – yes his ringer was on, yes Germany hadn't texted him.

Germany was usually on top of that sort of thing… he was going to make them a nice meal tonight and Focaccia too!

After checking for something like the 80th time in the past hour, Feliciano rolled over and covered his eyes with his arms. "Manageria miseria! What's wrong with me?" He asked himself woefully.

Surely he could get through Germany not being there for *one* of their usual hangouts, right? That wasn't the only thing on his mind though, Russia's story still sticking in his head, he kept thinking everything over. Germany totally would have told him, right? If him and America were quietly friends? Or…

He shook his head. Russia had a habit of misreading situations, maybe there was… some logical explanation on why America was taking Germany's clothes off...

"Smettila! Italy! Your better than this!" He lectured himself.

Then there was that other *other* thought bugging him. Germany's age… the fact he looked older because he had a *body* before he was Germany. His mind had started wondering if maybe… maybe…

He had always thought like Germany looked like what he'd imagine Holy Rome grown up to be...

Which made the idea that maybe Germany had gone off and secretly fallen for America…

He didn't like feeling this *negative* or close to slipping towards *sad* or *angry*. He wasn't jealous over Germany hanging out with America, he was blowing this out of proportion for sure!

He gave up on his nap for the first time in a century to go for a walk, mind unsettled and thoughts running away from him.

The next day, the world meeting was to continue. America was walking with a skip in his step. His hang-out with Germany had gone better than he thought! And they had texted more way after they went home too!

He was also excited because he had convinced Germany to ‘downgrade’ to a more “Business casual” look for the day. Which meant hair down, and button-down shirt with tie. Alfred was hoping to get the tie gone and the sleeves rolled next meeting.

He grinned when he saw Germany enter, still right on time, but he did, actually, look way younger. More age appropriate. Less stiff and stuffy for sure.

“Looking good dude!” He chirped, tossing fingerguns his way.

“Thank you, Alfred…” He paused before experimenting. “…Right back ‘atcha”

Alfred laughed. Bless him, he was trying.

Germany was admittedly nervous at such a change, but he also felt a strange sense of… *adrenaline*, it was a little exciting, even if others might see such a thing as ‘small potatoes’.

“Germany! Germany!” Came a familiar voice. He turned to see Italy jogging up to him.

He looked weirdly exhausted and on edge… was everything all right? Was he catching something?

“Ah, Italy. Sorry, our plans didn’t work out...” He said, tucking his hands into his pockets.

“It’s ah… It’s okay Germany!” Italy said hesitantly.

He noticed Italy was looking him up and down, he was beginning to feel a bit embarrassed.

“You look cute with your hair down Germany!” He said with a smile after a moment of pondering him. “You look a lot more relaxed today!”

“I!” He was about to protest being called cute, Italy called *him* cute… but decided against it. “Er… Thank you. I’m trying something new.”

“I can see that!” Italy replied. “Did you have fun with America yesterday?” He asked, changing the subject suddenly.

“Oh, er, yes, it was remarkably interesting actually. I think he’s right, we have a lot in common.”

Italy swallowed hard. Ludwig was really beginning to wonder if something was wrong…

“That’s… that’s great Germany!”

He paused, watching Italy for a moment before finally asking. “Are you alright Feli? You seem a bit pale and tired.”

“Oh? Do I? Haha! Guess I’ll have to take a long siesta today!” He shrugged off.

Italy’s response left Germany even more confused. Italy *would* tell him if something was wrong… right?

Though sometimes he was nervous that maybe Italy didn't think of him in such close regard as Germany did him… Italy had lots of friends after all…

They took their seats as the meeting began, Ludwig watching as Alfred rolled his eyes and seemed to be purposefully trying to fall asleep while England did his speaking. No doubt England would eventually notice, the first fight would spark, and the meeting would dissolve into chaos.

This would be his first test. He could *not* intervene. He had to let the other countries sort themselves out.

Germany had called it, England started out shouting at America for falling asleep, America called him 'boring and preachy', France agreed, and it was all downhill from there. He could see America quietly pull out his switch and begin playing his game.

Ludwig's finger twitched under the table as he took a deep breath. Normally… he'd intervene by now. He clicked his pen a few times in his hand. He slid his notebook closer to him and tapped his pen on the paper. America had suggested doodling… wasn't doodling where you just drew whatever came to mind?

America had a talent at randomness, he wasn't sure he had such a thing, but, here he was, might as well try.

He began drawing a crude doodle of a T-rex. It wasn't a good drawing at all. But it was strange… it wasn't supposed to be a nice drawing. It could be imperfect.

He lazily drew something like a cowboy hat on top of the dinosaurs head and smiled to himself. So THIS was what it was like to do something goofy! What other odd things was his mind capable of, he began to wonder. This was a far more interesting experiment than he ever imagined. The sounds of arguing slowly began to slip out of his mind. He drew a potato… wurst… some sort of robot, a doodle of England with sharp teeth and exaggerated thick angry eyebrows, a rocket ship, a burger America was eating, a mouse, a bowl of pasta and wurst next to each other.

"I like the little mouse you drew Germany, Its so cute!" came a hushed voice. He turned to Italy with a jump, his focus turning to him completely.

The fighting was still raging on, yet they were still in their own corners, avoiding the fight and letting them duke it out.

"Oh, well… you know…" he replied bashfully.

"I didn't know you liked to doodle!" Italy said cheerfully.

"…It's a new development." Germany admitted.

Italy looked up at him for a second, Ludwig once again catching an odd look in his eyes, before Italy scooted his chair over close enough so their arms were pressed together. "Can I doodle with you Germany?"

Germany scratched his cheek and felt flushed before nodding, opening his notebook to a new page and sliding it so it sat between them, Italy taking his own pen and starting his own doodle on the other side of the page.

When Germany's eyes flicked back over to Italy's drawing, he gaped, it felt like he blinked and suddenly Italy had rendered a portrait of Japan who was sitting on the other side of the table, in depth cross-hatch shading and everything.

"…You're just trying to show off, aren't you?" Germany teased, his very bad doodle of a dog feeling silly.

Italy chuckled. "No! No I swear! For me I like your simple cute doodles. You know Picasso spent his whole life working on simplifying his art! Its deceptively hard to simplify for some you know! Realistic doesn't necessarily mean its better!" He explained.

Ludwig supposed he had never thought of it that way, still…. He pointed at his dog. "Well, I appreciate your words, but I don't think this could end up in an art museum."

"You don't know that Germany! I've seen a lot of strange things end up in art museums!" He said with a laugh. "Besides, lots of them are filled with stuffy snobs anyway. Your art is so sweet, just like you."

Germany thought he might pass out from being called "cute" and "sweet" by Italy in the same day. He was sure it didn't mean anything deeper, but it was still, infuriatingly making his chest feel tight and feel overwhelmed with urges to become even closer with his friend, even if that could never happen.

"Thank you Feli." He said back softly.

He jumped as their nice moment was interrupted by England shouting from underneath France, they're fighting had turned into a full-on scuffle at some point and had just been wrestling each other.

"Oi! Kraut, are you going to do anything about this or just sit there?!" He demanded angrily.

Germany sighed, trying to ignore those two trying to drag him into their scuffle.

"Yo England if your so mature, why do you need Germany to solve your problems for you?" America demanded, not looking up from his game.

"How dare you lecture *me* about maturity you ungrateful little..!"

"America is once again right Britain, your just too stubborn to realize when your defeated~!" France said happily as they glared each other down.

Germany turned back to his and Italy's doodle page. That had been… easier than he thought.

Russia had been entertaining himself by watching America play his strange little game with Animals that involved catching virtual fish and bugs over his shoulder, but he was becoming more and more irritated with the noise being made. It made it so America would not speak, which saddened him. He looked over at Germany, who usually seemed to be the one to reel everyone in… however today he was different, whatever he and America had done had an impact.

Italy's eyes were fixated on Germany as the man seemed to have taken up the hobby of drawing strange pictures in his notebook.

He looked back to America as he made a sound of irritation and muttered "fucking… sea bass… OooooOo it's at *least* a C+, god… shut uuuuppp" under his breath.

This American said the oddest things sometimes. He didn't often understand him.

"Why are you upset at your game little America?" He asked, tilting his head.

"Meh, I'm not *that* upset, I'm just missing a few fish for my museum and its in season but it just… I just keep getting sea bass." America explained.

It didn't help this game make anymore sense to Russia but he was still hoping to hear America explain.

"You are collecting fish for a museum?" He asked.

America nodded and scooted a little closer to let Russia see the screen. "yeah man, want to see?"

"Yes, I welcome distraction from other irritating voices."

" 'cha dude."

He wasn't particularly interested in this make-believe museum owned by a sleepy owl, but he was interested in America's interest and explanation of it.

He barely noticed when England tried to get Germany to intervene, until Alfred, somehow picking up on what was going on, snapped back without hesitation : "Yo England if your so mature, why do you need Germany to solve your problems for you?"

Little America made very good point. Germany was even younger than America after all, it always had struck him as odd that so many countries dumped their responsibilities and expectations on him.

However how on earth had America been able to listen? Or was England perhaps just incredibly predictable? He would have to observe more in the future.

More minutes passed, and is irritation grew even further. England and France had still not stopped fighting, and it had cascaded into several other smaller countries arguing, Romano had started arguing with Austria at some point for some odd reason, maybe the other Italian representation simply wanted a new target to curse at that day…

Well… if no one else was going to step up and take the initiative…

Russia stood. He was one of the strongest and most experienced countries, so why not? Maybe they would all be impressed with his leadership and all become his friends.

He took out his trusty pipe and slammed it down to make a loud sound, not caring as the wood underneath splintered.

“If you would all like to be being quiet and acting like adults? If shouting and annoying arguments continue I will be forced to pound you all into dust and yank out all your teeth, да?” He announced cheerfully.

It wasn’t bad to give them extra motivation to be quiet, right?

The arguing countries shriveled back into their seats.

“Now England has proven he cannot use his time responsibly, so we will skip over to next country, Okay? Okay! Good! Let’s get along my friends!” He said with a smile, playing with the top of his pipe cheerfully.

England looked a bit purple in the face but didn’t dare argue as Russia sat back down. He was very proud of himself.

“Nice dude.” America nudged his arm, and he felt filled with a strange warmth at praise from the American.

“Thank you little one!”

“No problem big guy.” America hadn’t looked up from his game the whole time but was smiling away nonetheless.

Germany couldn’t believe it.

He didn’t have to intervene at all. He wasn’t responsible, for once… sure Russia had just scared the living daylights out of everyone, but everyone was back to being professional and orderly…

And he had just… doodled. Doodled with Italy, they had even started some friendly matches of hangman and tic-tac-toe (both of which Italy was surprisingly good at).

When the meeting was finally adjourned, America wandered over.

“So, how do you feel?” He asked with a smirk.

“…That… didn’t feel as bad as I thought it would.” Germany admitted.

Italy was looking between him and America in confusion. He'd have to explain more to Italy later.

"See? And Russia intervened instead! Even if he's a 'lil scary it works out."

Almost on cue, Russia seemed to appear next to America and interject. "Was I scary? I did not mean to be!"

America jumped but still responded easily. "Threats are inherently kind of scary dude."

"Are they?" Russia asked with a tilt of his head.

"…I guess maybe to you they aren't anymore, huh..?" America scratched his head.

"Nope!" Russia confirmed happily.

"Well hey, if it works, it works!" Alfred reassured, patting Russia on the back.

Germany watched as America grinned up slightly at Russia, and Russia seemed to stand closer to America than he used to, looking down at him almost *affectionately*. Perhaps they have some *chemistry* in that regard? America certainly seemed to bring him up a lot.

"Anyway, Germany, dude, I got ya something this morning!" America declared happily, reaching over to his backpack and pulling out a sizable box.

"O-Oh?" Germany asked, a bit startled, wondering what it could be as he took the box from America's outstretched hands.

"You said you liked cowboys and westerns, sooooo… think of this as a like… toast to being besties present!" America said with a grin and a bounce on his heels.

"…You like Westerns Germany?" Italy asked.

Oh… he supposed he had never mentioned that to Italy before… it had never really come up.

"Yeah, I do, my favorite movies are all westerns."

"Oh. I see." Italy replied unusually flatly, but Germany didn't take much notice.

Germany opened the box curiously, his eyes lighting up as he saw what was inside. It was one of those infamous cowboy hats, just like the ones in the movies.

"I was thinking I wanted to take you to the rodeo sometime, but we can't go if you don't match the aesthetic right?" America grinned.

"Yeah! You're right! Thank you, America!" Germany agreed excitedly, lifting the black hat out of the box and putting it on his head. "How do I look?" He asked, feeling a sudden burst of confidence.

America whistled and clapped. "You look like a real movie cowboy!"

“You look very handsome like that Germany!” Italy praised. This only made Germany get warm in the cheeks again. Why did Italy have to do this to him? Really…

“What is the purpose of this hat for cow-handlers? Why is it shaped in such a way?” Russia asked.

America was all too happy to explain it as Germany took the hat off and put it away for safe keeping.

“That must… that must be a really nice gift to get, huh Germany?” Italy asked.

“Yeah… its very kind. I appreciate it…”

Germany was completely oblivious to the Italian, as he turned away slightly bitter… silently begging to have strength in the face of such intense feelings of envy beginning to threaten to overwhelm him.

Chapter End Notes

* Cowboys and Westerns are very popular in Germany! Texan's main out of country tourists are German because of this, and you can find a lot of cowboy themed bars if you visit Germany.

Invite

Chapter Summary

Italy gets a second opinion, Germany is oblivious, Russia has a realization.

Italy had to get a second opinion, how did America keep knowing all these things about Germany that he didn't? He and Germany had been friends longer… but Germany had opened up to America about all these cute things and not him?

Did Germany not trust him?

He was feeling a strange amount of aggression he had really preferred not to have for centuries. He had fought so little over the years to the point where he was really only good at fencing and hadn't been super determined to defeat another country at all. War and fighting always just lead to so much… *loss*.

Maybe Germany would be impressed with a show of force though?

…There was no way he could fight America… what was he thinking?!

He wanted to kick himself, was he really thinking about fighting *America* over Germany? Besides… even if Germany did like America, he should be a good friend and just be happy for them, if you love someone – let them go and all.

On the other other hand, maybe he was just being dramatic, coming up with things that weren't even happening…

"Japan!" He cried, finally able to corner the other nation so they could talk. Japan always seemed to have good insight… and knew them both well enough to come to probably better conclusions than Italy was drawing in a panic.

"Oh, Hello Italy. … You are upset about something?" He asked.

"I think America and Germany have some sort of secret realationshipandGermanyisactingsodifferenttodayanddontgetmewronghelooksocute? Haveyouseenhiswaistohmygodhessocoolandhandsomeandbraveandcuteandsweetandamazing butamericanknowssomuchandIdontandwhatam I going to do???"

The way Japan was staring at him like a deer in headlights, he was guessing he had started talking too fast again.

"I-I'm sorry Italy, I didn't catch a lot of that."

“I know, sorry Japan. I just have a lot of feelings and don’t know where to start…”

Japan looked at him thoughtfully. “Well, I did catch that this is some concern over Germany. He looked unusually relaxed today, and he didn’t intervene at all… I saw you two drawing together as well, very cute.” He said sincerely. “However this begs the question of why the worry?”

“Because… I think he’s relaxed because of *America*.”

“…*America* relaxed Germany?” Japan thought aloud.

“You used to room with America Japan… do you… do you think America and Germany are having some sort of secret romance???”

“Secret Romance???” Japan questioned, quietly looking in Germany and America’s direction. “That would be an interesting plot twist…”

“Japan!” Italy complained.

“Sorry, Sorry.” Japan apologized. “But in all sincerity, I think it may just be that Germany and America found something to relate to in each other, and maybe this is helping Germany feel like he has ‘permission’ to calm down.”

Japan stared at Italy, who didn’t look very settled at all. “I see… perhaps you wish that *you* were the one causing Germany to look relaxed and start smiling?”

Italy turned a little red, picking at his nails slightly. “Maybe.” He admitted. “I just don’t get it, America seems to know a bunch of things about Germany that… that Germany never told me.”

Japan hummed. “Perhaps, Germany was just stuck taking a protective role for you. America may be seen as ‘immature’ but he’s more than capable of taking care of himself. So maybe… Germany is relating to him personally and not feeling like he has to be a ‘rock’ of sorts.” He theorized.

Italy drooped as Japan spoke. He knew despite being an old country he had been very reliant on Germany in past. He felt awful, what if Germany really hadn’t felt he could be himself because he was trying to look after *him*. He was starting to feel particularly… *small* and *useless*.

“You might be right…” Italy said sadly.

“B-But don’t get discouraged Italy! I think everyone can see it’s a fact that Germany thinks the world of you.”

“Really?” Italy perked up, and Japan nodded confidently.

“Thank you Japan.” Italy felt a new sense of determination.

If Germany really didn't feel comfortable letting fully loose around him, he was going to change that ASAP! He had made a promise a long time ago to help Germany out if he needed it, and he was going to make good on that dammit. He may sometimes hate fighting, but he was an Italian of his word dammit!

"I wish you luck Italy." Japan encouraged as they said their goodbyes.

Japan watched Italy go with a shake of his head. It was silly sometimes, how much those two men obviously adored each other, and yet still hadn't managed to fit the pieces together.

"Okay okay, what's something you've wanted to do, but held yourself back, cause you told yourself it was 'irresponsible' or whatevs." America asked.

Germany thought about it for a moment before blushing and toying with a now loose strand of hair awkwardly. "You may laugh but, I sort of always wanted to drive a motorcycle… my brother has one, he terrifies me when he goes out riding without a helmet but… he does have a lot of fun…"

"No way I'd laugh at that dude! Motorcycles and guys that drive them are so cool!!" America cheered before getting a playful grin. "I think you should get one."

The idea alone had that burst of adrenaline coursing through him again, it was what he imagined had to be the source of many young people's risky behavior, but… well…

"I don't know…" He stammered.

"If you get one… I'll race you with my sports car…" America offered with a grin.

Ludwig almost wanted to roll his eyes, of course America would have a sports car. … He did kind of want to see it though, it was understandably annoying to some, but engines revving still gave him chills, and he totally hadn't kept magazines of men next to cars and motorcycles… he was… purely interested in the vehicles of course.

He remembered Italy showing him his Ferrari… it was so impractical, and Italy barely drove it because it was a car purely for show… and the occasional 'driving way over the speed limit expedition', the one thing Italy seemed to really have no fear around. Dear lord that had really had him weak in the knees, and it felt like Italy *knew* it with how he had grinned at him when he was showing him.

"That's incredibly irresponsible and dangerous." Germany pointed out.

"Yeah, and? What… afraid I'll beat you?" America said sticking his tongue out at grinning.

Damn the American… that had lit the fire in his stomach. "It's incredibly dangerous… but I am a *very* good driver."

"Alright… then you're going to have to prove it to me." America declared, taking one of his 'hero' stances and staring playfully at his future opponent.

“I hope your ready to have that ego of yours thoroughly destroyed.” He challenged, finding himself grinning as well.

Had he been an adrenaline junkie this whole time and not known it? America really was bringing a lot out in him.

Their future challenge was set, and he was feeling good. He then felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned to see Italy looking up at him.

“Heeyy! Germany! I was thinking if your free we could hang out tonight since we missed yesterday?” The Italian offered.

Ludwig was about to check his schedule, but then he remembered America’s advice of trying to just “do what you feel like” first as another ‘youthful’ thing to do.

“Yeah, we can do that.” Germany confirmed with a small half smile.

“Perfect!” Italy chirped happily, standing very close to the German.

America fake-saluted them both. “He’s all yours now little dude! Have fun!” He waved and headed off, seemingly to bother Russia.

Italy’s demeanor seemed to sour a little bit, eye twitching slightly. Italy seemed irritated more often lately, Germany felt like he’d really have to see if everything was okay with his Italian friend.

“*non mi serve la vostra approvazione.”*

Ludwig barely managed to catch Italy muttering something under his breath in response to America. Something about… approval? He really had to brush up on his Italian…

“Are you okay Italy?” Germany asked.

Italy perked up immediately. “Oh! Yes I’m fine, don’t worry about me at all Germany!”

Italy tugged on his arm to lead him away. “Now let’s go! I have a really good dinner planned, so you can just sit back and relax while I take care of everything, okay?”

“Er… okay.” Germany agreed.

Italy was acting even stranger than usual.

“Ruhhhh-shiiiiiaahhhhhh, Rush-man, mount rushmore!” America called towards Ivan.

“None of those are my name.” Russia answered in confusion.

“I… yeah, I know, but aren’t they fun?” America asked.

“You like giving me fun little nicknames, I will have to come up with more for you it seems to keep up.” Russia responded with a slight smile.

America beamed back at him. “Well, I mean, yeah… ya know…”

“I am curious about your developments with Germany. You two have already become close and Germany seems to be taking your suggestions to heart.” Russia observed.

America scratched the back of his head. “Yeah… I guess, I don’t know, we have a lot to talk about…”

Russia buried his nose in his scarf. And odd thought of “*Talk to me, not him.”* Entered his mind. This feeling was confusing.

“Anywaaaayy… I was just going to say, since you liked watching me play Animal Crossing, I was wondering, if like… ya know… if you’re not doing anything, if you wanted to come back home with me and like… I don’t know we could play some games together or something?” America said, seemingly not able to sit still as he shifted back and forth on his feet.

“You are inviting me over?” Russia asked, slightly shocked.

“Y… Yeah…. Is that, a problem?” America mumbled slightly.

“Not at all! I would love to partake in ‘hang out’ with friend!” Russia confirmed excitedly.

“Haha, yeah friend…. Great! We’ll have fun!”

Russia followed America who had already begun chattering away about video games he wanted to play, he wanted to start humming he felt so warm and happy being invited to be around his friend America!

America used to grate on him, and his arrogance made him want to make generous use of his pipe, but he more and more found himself wanting to do anything to get his America to talk more.

A cold chill washed through him from his own thoughts.

“His America?” He thought.

Such context would give the impression of some sort of romantic feeling…

Oh dear…

This was… a development he was not expecting from himself.

Hang out

Chapter Summary

It'd be nice if saying important things was easier

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

America was inwardly bouncing up and down, and outwardly bouncing a little. Things were really going his way! He was making good friends with Germany, would get to *race* him, and now he had Russia following him.

Sure, he hadn't been able to double down on wanting to ask Russia out in the context of a date, but hey, this was a step in trying to see if such a thing with Ru-Ru was even possible.

For all he knew maybe Russia just liked big 'ol biddies, just absolute giant badankahonkers, which he didn't have unfortunately in that sense, or maybe Russia just… didn't. He had no idea. But if nothing else, good relations and spreading his heroic friendship around was a good thing!

He was thinking maybe they could play a horror game, and he could show Russia how brave and cool he was in a safe setting.

He grinned as he imagined Russia grabbing onto him, praising him, saying something like "My hero! Kiss me you beautiful American!"

He laughed to himself at the cheesy ending to his internal movie. Maybe it'd also be super cool to have a moment where they were both being badass and had a passionate kiss in the middle of battle, explosions erupting around them, not giving a damn who saw 'cause no one would dare fuck with such an awesome power couple.

He was getting a little ahead of himself though. One step at a time.

"We gotta turn the lights off to get the right *atmosphere*, ya know?" America announced.

"Ah, I see, you want to play scary game! This sounds entertaining."

"Hell yeah dude!" America practically leapt onto the couch next to Russia, not caring that he bumped up against him slightly.

America began his game excitedly, super confident and ready to destroy some scary bad guys.

His confidence began to slip away from him however as scary sounds from the game filled the room and he was jumpscared a few times.

…He had never fully been able to get through this game now he thought about it.

“Are you cold America?” Russia asked ‘innocently’.

“Huh? Why?” America asked, eyes flicking between the screen and Russia.

“You keep trying to lean against me.”

America paled. “O-Oh… sorry…”

He began moving to scoot away, when suddenly large Russian hands grabbed his waist, and he found himself lifted up through the air. His brain stopped working for a second, forgetting all about ghosts and scary things. He was placed in Russia’s lap, and Ivan simply wrapped his arms around his torso in a calm hug and rested his head on top of America’s head.

“There! Now you will not be cold!” Russia said happily.

Right, cold he was totally cold, and not burning up as his mind and heart raced away at a million miles per second.

Did Russia even know what he was doing to him??? Geeze!

… Well he’d enjoy being wrapped in a Russian for as long as he could. Suddenly the game didn’t seem so scary anymore. What kind of ghost could hurt him or sneak up on him with Ivan wrapped around him like a super amazing anti-ghost shield anyway?

“Are you sure you’re not too tired to hang out Feli?” Germany said, furrowing his brows in concern.

“Oh sure! Don’t worry about me at all Germany! I don’t need to nap *all* the time. Unless you want to take a siesta with me!” Italy offered in a happy voice.

“I don’t know how you sleep in the middle of the day.” Germany grunted. “Even when I’ve tried I’ve found it difficult.”

“That’s because you think too hard Germany! I can see it when you get that little crinkle between your eyebrows!” Italy replied with a grin.

Germany rubbed the spot Italy was referring to instinctively, wondering if he could massage it out.

“If you want to take an afternoon nap you just gotta let yourself relax! But even so, we don’t have to sleep, I can just have some espresso!” Italy said, trying to ease Germany’s mind and let him know he was okay.

“Hrm… if your sure, if you do feel like you need a nap, I suppose… I wouldn’t mind trying.” Germany offered, turning a bit red as remembering the fact Italy liked to *cuddle* tended to do.

“I know Germany! We can have a coffee nap! Its super-efficient! You might like that!” Italy offered as he parked his car.

“A coffee nap? What is it?” Germany asked curiously, loosening his tie as they entered into Italy’s house.

Italy watched him hang up his tie on the coat hanger inside the door and stared at him loosening the two top buttons on his shirt before immediately distracting himself with putting his own coat away.

“A coffee nap is where you have some coffee before taking a 20 minute nap! It’s supposedly the amount of time it takes for the caffeine to fully kick in, so you wake up super energized!”

Germany was curious now. “Really? That does sound efficient…”

“Then let’s let you test it out Germany! I’ll make the coffee!” Italy announced excitedly.

Italy went to the kitchen, and Germany settled into the living room. He was about to start tidying up which he tended to do for Italy out of habit when he realized there was a problem…

The living room was immaculate. He had nothing to do.

He sat down awkwardly. Fiddling with a pillow on the couch. Italy usually wasn’t very neat and orderly at all… now he *knew* something had to be going on. Maybe Italy was more upset he didn’t visit yesterday than he thought?

“Hey! Germany are you thirsty?” Italy called. “Do you want some mineral water while the coffee is brewing?”

“Yeah, that’d be nice thank you.” He called back, still staring at the clean room in awe.

He moved a coaster on the coffee table slightly to the right to still feel like he did *something*.

“You cleaned up in here.” He finally commented as Italy came back with the fizzing water in tow.

“huh? Oh! Si… I was having trouble sleeping last night, so I tidied up!” He said with a wave of his hand.

“Why couldn’t you sleep? That seems odd for you…” Ludwig commented.

“Oh you know…” Italy rubbed his neck. “I just had too much I wanted to do!” He said.

Ludwig was still unconvinced, but he dropped it. “I can understand that.”

Something about the air felt tense, Ludwig hated how awkward things were sometimes between them. Ludwig wished he could just will away any confusing feelings he had for Italy. Their friendship meant too much to him… but he still wished he knew what was going through Italy's head sometimes when he got quiet or shrugged serious topics off. He was doing it more today than usual."

"Soooooooooooo….." Italy said trying to break the silence. "How come you never told me you liked America's western movies?" He said, cheerily despite the fact he was internally feeling a little sour about it.

"Oh, I suppose it never came up." Ludwig said with a blush. "It's a bit embarrassing anyway isn't it?"

"Not at all Germany!" Italy responded. "We should watch some Spaghetti Westerns that were made in my country sometime!"

Ludwig perked up immediately. "Y-eah! That could be fun."

"Hehe, your eyes light up and get all big when you're talking about something you like Germany, it's cute. I want to see that look on your face more!" Italy said sincerely.

Why was Italy throwing so many compliments and statements like *that* his way today, he was going to make him pass out for real one of these days. He hated feeling like he was swooning like an idiot.

"I… er… um I…." Germany failed at words, already overwhelmed with feelings.

"Oooh! I better check on Coffee!" Italy said, already leaping up.

Thank god for Italy and his coffee… and also his slight snootiness about it. When it came to food , coffee and espresso, Italy always seemed really offended by what he called America's "Bastardization" of such things.

He sat and thought about it. What *were* Italy's thoughts on America? Now that he thought about it, Italy was friendly, but especially recently it seemed like all his comments surrounding America were *negative*, even when put in a 'nice' way. Italy wasn't one to make enemies, but that did not mean he didn't know Italy couldn't still have dislikes.

Italy's coffee was good though, with that in mind.

"Er… Italy, what do you think of America?" He asked as he took a long sip.

Italy seemed to freeze for a second before humming. "He's fine… I guess…" Germany was once again unconvinced. "What do you think of America, Germany?"

"I feel like I misjudged him. There's more to him than I thought… and I suppose I find myself relating to him." He confessed.

He could feel Italy's honey eyes staring at him. "I feel bad I didn't know you're so young…"

“Don’t be, I didn’t lie about it, but I didn’t exactly announce it either.” He said, shrugging it off.

“I feel like I wouldn’t have put so much on you if I knew.” Italy suddenly said quietly, hanging his head.

Ludwig stiffened and raised his eyebrows. “Italy I don’t mind protecting or looking after you…” He said honestly.

“But you shouldn’t have to LuLu! I’m a descendant of Rome! I’ve been around for thousands of years! I should be better than that…”

Ludwig stared in shock as Italy gritted his teeth at his own outburst. He hadn’t heard Italy bring up Rome in relation to himself before… He wondered… did Italy feel some sort of burden of expectation from being a descendant of someone like that?

“It-italy, it’s really okay. I’ve never minded. You're my friend.”

Italy shook his head. “No Germany, it’s not fair to you. Even if you feel like you don’t mind, its still not fair.” He looked up, eyes wide open, serious and full of determination, it sent shivers down Ludwig’s spine with its sincerity. “I want to protect you too Germany, I made a promise to you I’d help you out in a pinch, and I want to make good on that. I want you to know you can relax and be yourself around me, I want you to know you’ll still be my friend and I’ll still lo…. *Like* you no matter what kind of person you chose to be or what you decide to do, as long as your *Happy* Germany… as long as I can support you and be your equal, that’s all that matters to me.”

Germany was full on stunned; his eyes felt a little wet too. Italy’s speech and resolution had… moved him in a way he didn’t feel possible.

“Italy… I… I you…”

“*I love you.”* He thought. “*I love you so much it hurts. I always have.”*

He finally admitted it, to himself… if only… If only he could tell Italy himself.

Italy was suddenly by his side, setting down his coffee and pulling him into a hug, and Ludwig slowly reciprocated, enjoying the warm Italian that smelled like spring and warmth and spice in his arms.

Italy rubbed little affectionate circles into his back.

“*I hope you’ll let me in Germany.”* Italy thought. *“I’ll love you to the end of existence itself my sweet German.”* If only he could say such things to this man out loud.

Chapter End Notes

CAAAAN YOU FEEEEEEL THE LOOOOOOOVE TONIIIIIIGHT

Determination Part 1

Chapter Summary

Encouragement from Family is a good thing, usually.

Italy had been right about the coffee nap, he'd have to employ the use of it when he needed to be up late for work, because he awoke when the timer went off feeling more than ready to get back up. He also found himself able to 'snooze' easier due to knowing he wouldn't be asleep for ages.

Italy stretched and rolled off the bed to stand. "What did you think Germany?" Italy asked, clearly feeling more energized himself.

"It was indeed effective, you were right. I can do that sort of nap." He agreed, stretching his back out, arching it until he could feel some of the tension release.

"I still prefer my long siestas of course, but in a pinch this works!" Italy said encouragingly, totally not watching Germany stretch with a lot of interest. "And if Germany does them that's good because that means he's getting more rest!"

"I suppose I'm getting the message from everyone that I need to 'chill out' hmm?" He teased.

Italy laughed. "You work so hard all the time Luddy, you should be able to enjoy life and have fun."

Ludwig hummed. Alright, he was getting the message loud and clear.

Maybe he also didn't mind *too* much getting so much positive attention all of the sudden.

He followed Italy, who was ready to get started on dinner, and already babbling about a strange show he had watched that confused him.

"Then they just started having sex out of nowhere, they didn't even have any chemistry! It wasn't romantic at all! It was just gratuitous!" Italy complained.

Germany snorted. Of course Italy would be pissed off at a movie with bad romance. Italy was one of the romantic countries after all.

Which gave him a thought. "Italy, erm… If you… if you liked someone like that, how would you… I mean… how would you go about beginning a romance?"

Italy faltered in his pouring of wine. "Wh-Wha Germany, you want to learn how to start being romantic with someone?!" He said almost in a panic.

Germany turned red. “It’s not something I’m *exactly good at*. I have to consult a manual on how to make *friends* even.”

Italy looked at him amused as he began cutting up Focaccia for them to snack on. “Germany, you silly goose, you don’t need to consult a manual on those types of things, there’s no way they could apply to real life properly.”

“I know… they’ve proven very much not helpful in the least. But I don’t know how else to do it…” He admitted.

Italy drummed his fingers on the table. “I guess if you wanted to let someone know you like them like that, you’d notice the little things about them, and let them know that you appreciate them! You know, be honest and forward! Like when you see a pretty girl you should tell them they’re pretty!” He explained.

“Forwardness…” Germany repeated.

It seemed when he had tried to be forward with Italy he had just ended up scaring him on that valentines day ages ago.

“But, what if you just end up being awkward?” He asked.

“hmm, sometimes Love *is* awkward, and that’s okay too! It can be endearing.” Italy said before pausing, taking a long sip of his wine.

“…Is there someone you like Germany?” Italy suddenly asked.

Germany ran his finger around the edge of his glass awkwardly, hanging his head. Italy *had* told him to be forward… but he didn’t want to ruin the evening and their *friendship* with something like this.

“I suppose so, but I don’t think they like me that way back.” He confessed vaguely.

Italy was silent for a long moment. “If they pass you up Germany… they’re an idiot.”

Germany stared at Italy perplexed as his friend crossed his legs and looked away out the window. What did that mean? And why was Italy so hard to read lately?

When Germany left, Italy finally collapsed in a defeated heap. It was confirmed now, wasn’t it? Germany was interested in someone, and had asked him for advice. Of course Germany would be looking to him for advice, a romance country and his best friend.

But there was only one other person it could possibly be.

“*Come on Italy, be a supportive friend. Don’t be a dick.”*

But he didn’t really feel like being a friend. He wanted to be *more* than Germany’s friend or best friend. Despite knowing it would probably get him no help, he turned over from being

face planted in his pillows on the bed to calling his brother.

“What the hell do you want?” He immediately heard his brother respond after barely two rings.

Italy shook his head. Romano was silly sometimes.

“Romanooooooo Germany is in love with someone and it’s not me!” He complained.

Romano grumbled. “Why do you think I care who that stupid walking potato is interested in?”

“RomaNO I’m upset! I need my big brother!” He grumbled in response.

Romano growled and cursed to himself. “Well don’t get all bent out of shape, I’ll be there to comfort your sorry ass soon.”

“Thank you Romano!” Italy said in relief.

Even if Romano tended to be a little grumpy, he didn’t want to be alone with depressing thoughts.

“Brother! I’m home.” Germany called out.

He heard his brother stalk out of the basement quickly. “Awfully social lately huh? Good! Spread your kick-ass-ness around!” His brother praised.

Ludwig rolled his eyes and changed the subject. “How’s your finger East?”

Gilbert waved his bandaged hand. He had been chopping up potatoes a few days ago when the knife that *Ludwig had told him to sharpen before using dammit* slipped.

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it little brother.”

Ludwig sighed in response. He didn’t like how long it took his brother to heal from injuries these days. It was only *barely* faster than a mortal.

“Well anyway, I have a question… or a sort of request…” He began, clearing his throat.

Gilbert leaned back against the wall and crossed his arms. “Oh? What can your amazing and super-stronk big brother do for you little one?” He asked with a grin.

Ludwig wasn’t going to bother to remind Gilbert he was much taller than him now and not “little” in the slightest.

“I was going to get my own motorcycle, since you’ve already been driving one, I was wondering if…GAH BROTHER!!!” Germany shouted in protest as Gilbert tackled him.

“Of course I’ll teach you everything I know!!” He laughed as he gripped his brother in a tight hug, startling Ludwig as he lifted him up off the ground. “Look at you! You’re finally doing something fun! I’m so proud!!!”

“I er… well… um… America is trying to teach me to ‘act my age’ whatever that means so…”

“No wonder you’ve looked way more chill the past couple days.” Gilbert mused, putting his brother back down.

“America is a good friend for you to have! I approve.” Gilbert declared with a nod.

“Er, thank you brother.”

“This is going to be so fun!” Gilbert cheered. “Teaching my little bro-bro to ride a motorcycle like a badass! I’m definitely going to come with you when you’re picking out your own, we’ll have to get you geared up too! You know people totally go wild for a guy in leather, YOU’LL BE UNSTOPPABLE.”

Ludwig cringed at his brother starting to shout excitedly, but he put up with it. He didn’t think Gilbert always knew his own volume level, so he didn’t lecture him on it. Besides, he didn’t want to interrupt his excitement.

It would be nice to do something as brothers… it had been too long. Maybe this would be another benefit of not focusing only on work so much.

“Alright you sad sack, get up and tell your brother what the hell has got you being so dramatic when it comes to Germany.” Romano said, yanking his brother up off the bed.

“I’m not being dramatic!”

Romano stared at Italy flatly.

“…Maybe I’m being a bit dramatic, but can you blame me?” Italy admitted sheepishly.

“Yes. Yes I can.” Romano answered, dragging his half tipsy brother out of his dark bedroom, taking him out on the upstairs patio so they could sit out with some fresh air.

“Germany is crushing on America!” Italy declared right when they both were sitting down.

Romano snorted. “Potato man and Burger boy? Match made in heaven. They can be called the junk-food couple!”

“Fratello!!” Italy complained.

“Oh come on, that was hilarious dammit.” Romano chided.

Italy huffed. “Pleaaaase Romano, this is love! This is serious!”

“Well if that German is into America, than clearly he has no taste, so what’s the problem?”

“The problem is he’s getting away from me!” Italy complained, somehow having more wine he was drinking already. “Is that possessive? We aren’t even together and I’m acting like a doofus!! I feel like I need to go confess for being so envious!!”

Romano looked around, he needed to be at least a little drunk to deal with this emotional pining crap. Feliciano better not complain about him drinking his wine, this was the bare minimum payment he should get.

“You’re really going to let *America* romance Germany before you? Lame.” Romano grunted, finally happy to be sipping wine himself.

“I’m not lame!” Italy retorted.

“You’re *so* lame! You call yourself a romance country but you’re going to let the guy that dumps fuckin’ excessive cheese on everything steal away your guy? Totally lame.”

Italy seemed to be thinking his words over. “I’ve been trying to flirt with Germany, but he hasn’t been receptive at all! He always changes the subject or looks away…”

“That German is an idiot, he probably thinks you’re just being ‘nice’.” Romano grumbled.

“*Shit…”* Italy cursed, making Romano barely hold back a laugh, it was always more funny when the seemingly ‘innocent’ North Italy actually cursed out loud.

“How is calling someone cute and handsome ‘just being nice’?” Italy asked mournfully.

Romano shrugged. “I don’t fuckin’ know. I just know he’s *stupid*. And the idea of him being whipped over America and not you is *stupid*.”

“But he asked me for advice on romancing someone fratello! And he and America started hanging out, Germany has been acting all different, America knew things about him I didn’t, and Russia said he saw them taking off each others clothes!” Italy babbled wildly.

“You’re really going to trust *Russia’s* perception and word on things? If you’re friendly to that guy even once and he thinks you’re *best* friends.” He pointed out.

“I don’t know…” Italy said, hanging his head.

Romano sighed and put his wine glass down. “Look, if your really worried about America sweeping Germany off his feet or something, why take it lying down? If you want something you should go for it! Don’t let that bastard just steal your man without doing anything about it!”

Italy looked at Romano and furrowed his brows. “How can I compete with America??”

Romano nearly spit out his drink. “How??? *HOW???* What the hell is wrong with you little brother!? We are descendants of Rome! Italy is the most romantic country in the world, fuck whatever France says about *him* being the best! If you think America can even compete you

really are a fucking dumbass!" he scoffed. "Stupid fucking idiot, I can't believe you're my brother, keeling over like that."

Italy stared at him completely stunned. "You… really think I should still give going up against America a shot? What if I loose horribly?!"

"Better than just lying down like a baby! Come on now." He looked at Italy seriously. "You fucking want that German idiot? You fucking get him and don't fucking let go."

"Yeah…" Italy slowly agreed. "Yeah!" He stood up with determination.

"If that American bastard thinks he can just take Germany's heart he's got a storm coming!" Italy decided despite being close to full on drunk.

"Now *that's* more like it!" Romano praised. "Show both of those blondies what your made of!"

"Yeah!" Italy cheered, fully pumped up… now that he had been encouraged.

America was the enemy, and Italy wasn't going down without a fight, for better or worse.

Familly

America tried to not show how down he was when he and Russia's lap were separated from each other, it being time for Russia to go.

America thought about going full on out, maybe seductively asking Russia to stay the night. Problem was he wasn't really sure how to be "seductive" with full confidence. He was half worried Russia would just laugh at him.

"H-Hey, it was nice hanging out. We should do it again." America said, bouncing as he looked up at Russia.

"Yes, I much prefer this to fighting!" Russia agreed. "You have good night new best friend!"

"Ye… Yeah, ha… you too bestie!" America stammered.

He tried to will himself to just leap forward, right there, in front of the whole neighborhood and kiss that big guy to stop him from leaving again. Do some grand gesture. Confess he had been quietly crushing on the big guy since he had stuck by him during his civil war… not like France and England who had full on *betrayed* him for money of all things.

But he couldn't make himself move. So the Russian just… left.

Once he was alone in his empty house he put his head in his hands and groaned. He really was acting like a desperate teenager god dammit! This wasn't heroic or cool at all!

The next morning, he burst into his brothers house, startling his twin in the middle of breakfast.

"Alfred! Knock!" Matthew lectured in a panic, picking up a bottle of maple syrup he had spilled.

"But I've got a big problem Mattie! A big Russian problem!"

Mattie sighed and gestured for Alfred to sit down, since he was already here. "Again?"

"It's just… what do you mean again???" Alfred asked, puffing out his cheeks, very offended.

"You just seem to have a Russian problem every few years. Why don't you just tell him you like him that way Alfred?" Mattie asked with furrowed brows.

"I can't JUST do that Mattie!" Alfred complained. "What if he doesn't like me back? What if he's homophobic? You know they don't let you do that in his country still. I mean I was still totally not straight when my country didn't allow it either, but still you never know! He's been around a while, maybe he's old school, maybe he does like guys but he won't like ME that way in particular!"

Mattie gestured for America to slow down. “Don’t jump so far into the future Alfred, you’ll just make yourself upset. Just mellow out a little.”

“That’s easy for you to say. Your like… Mister Mellow…. You got any of those brownies by the way?”

“Of course, I do, but remember not to go so fast this time? I don’t want to get called by your boss again because you had a bad freak-out because you didn’t *wait* after eating the recommended amount like I told you.” Canada said, disapproval in his voice.

“I know, I know, I’ll be more careful, I learned my lesson.” America argued, puffing out his chest a little.

“But really, I think you should just be straightforward.” Matthew said firmly.

“There’s no way dude.”

Matthew sighed in exasperation. “Well what do you want from me then Alfred? I’ve never even been in a relationship, how am I supposed to know?”

“I should totally hook you up with someone, hmm… who’s available? I think Germany has a brother…” Alfred wondered out loud.

“Alfred, focus.”

“Right right….. I sat in Russia’s lap last night.” He mused with a dopey grin.

Matthew nearly choked on his pancakes before looking at Alfred in befuddlement. “And your *worried* he doesn’t like you like that???”

“Hey! If he was anyone else, but this is Russia, he’s *weird*. He kisses people to say hi!” He argued.

Matthew sighed. “Alfred, you should really ask someone who knows about relationships and has been around longer?”

“Like who?” Alfred asked wearily.

“France?” Matthew suggested.

“No way dude! He’d be weird about it and probably start gossip!”

“Well then ask England or something, I don’t know!”

Alfred paled and put his hands in his coat pocket. “No way.”

“Why not?”

“Why *not* Why N O T? Mattie, I know your on good terms with him, but come on…”

“He’d probably be happy to give you advice Alfred!” Matthew tried to encourage.

“No way… he wouldn’t get it…” America said, turning away.

“It might make him happy if you talked to him about it.” Matthew encouraged again. “He still raised you…”

On one hand, Alfred kind of got it, Canada had always been both caught up in the middle of and tried to be a mediator between him and England, but it still annoyed him.

“He did a shit job of it, and just because he raised me doesn’t mean he’s *family*.” America said bitterly.

Matthew sighed. “I know…”

“Besides… I’m tried of having to be the one going to him to try and make things better. If he cared he’d actually *talk* to me and not take every opportunity to tell me what’s *wrong* with me.”

Mattie sighed, unable to really argue with Alfred on that. “Your right… I wish… he wouldn’t do that.”

Alfred furrowed his brows. “It’s not your job to try and fix things either Mattie. I know you want us all to get along again but… England has gotta take the initiative for once.”

Mattie looked up at him with big eyes before hanging his head. “I know he does. I just… I hoped… ugh. I’m sorry I suggested him. And here I was telling *you* to be chill.”

Alfred stood up and went to the other side of the table to hug his twin brother. “Hey, it’s okay Mattie. I know the feeling of trying to be a hero for others, even if they haven’t earned it yet.”

Mattie hugged him back. A moment of silence blossoming between them.

“…I still think you should just be blunt and tell Russia you want to jump his bones.” Mattie said bluntly.

“lol no way dude.” And yes, Alfred F. Jones did say “LOL” out loud.

Alfred had fun texting Germany often while they were all busy with work withing their respective countries. He had quickly found his new friend adored dogs too. He always seemed to get the biggest reaction out of Germany with pictures of cute doggos and dog related memes. He also loved getting pictures of Germany’s three puppos, they were so damn CUTE, and he could tell Germany adored them too.

He’d also begun trading random stories of their history with each other. America had told him about the toy soldiers England had made for him, Germany had told him how he and Italy actually met, America traded some stories of his banter with Russia during the cold war, and some mishaps over the red phone that had happened. It was fun talking to the German, he took his word seriously, even when America rambled about something and Germany didn’t *really* understand, he was still encouraging. It was great!

After about a month or so of hangs and conversations, he got a text from his buddy:

“Me and my brother are going to go look at motorcycles today, do you want to come with?”

America was practically already out the door when he responded. “Hell yeah dude!”

When America arrived, he had to do a double take at Germany. The other guy had taken his advice about dressing younger to heart it seemed. It was the most casual he had ever seen Germany. He wasn’t dressed for work or for working out, he was just… dressed like a young guy living his life. He had been gifted a leather jacket from his brother, which looked hella good on him, and the rest of him was just… regular ‘ol T-shirt and Jeans that fit him nicely. He was so proud.

He had gotten better at figuring out styling his hair when it was down too, it looked a little bit windswept instead of flat.

“Dude you look great!” Alfred praised, grabbing Germany’s hand and pulling him into a bro hug, which Germany fell into more naturally this time than he had the first few times he had done it.

“Danke, Alfred.”

Gilbert came out behind him and fake sniffled. “Right? I’m so proud of my little brother. He’s growing up!”

Alfred laughed at the irony of saying this was Ludwig “Growing up” when he was technically starting to act more like a young adult and less like an old man.

“Has Italy seen you like this yet?” Alfred asked, looking him up and down.

“Oh… no not yet.” Germany admitted with a wild blush that made Gilbert laugh.

“Holy fuck dude, if he didn’t already think you were hot shit, I don’t know how he’s gonna not see it now. He’d have to be blind.” America said honestly.

“OH! Well, I…. *Oh…*” Germany responded bashfully, if Alfred didn’t know any better he thought Germany was about to start giggling from embarrassment. “Well, I don’t know about *that*, but thank you.”

“That boy has you whipped.” Gilbert commented with a grin as they all piled into the car together.

“Shut u p.” Ludwig snapped, which just had Gilbert cackling more.

This was going to be a fun day, Alfred could already tell.

Determination Part 2

Chapter Summary

The Jealousy bug has spread and its intensity grows.

Germany had a light feeling in his chest he hadn't felt in a long time. He was… he was enjoying himself! Full on enjoying himself. It was nice "geeking out" as Alfred called it over the motorcycles before them with his brother and America.

Being here with his brother was reminding him of the days where he visually looked like a teenager still, and him and Gilbert got super into engineering together.

Internally he hadn't quite gotten over America's comment around his… 'attractiveness'. He hadn't exactly set out to get such a reaction, and he wasn't sure what to do now that he had. He did feel relaxed. He did sort of feel a sense of freedom in being able to act a little less restrained… *would* Italy have that kind of reaction to him? Did he *want* Italy to react to him like that?

He flushed a little as he thought about it. Maybe… if Italy *did* have that kind of reaction… maybe he did like the idea of Italy thinking he was attractive. His heart began sinking as quickly as it had begun floating. If Italy didn't even like men in the slightest… then nothing he could do would matter would it?

No! This was a good day, he couldn't let his mind and heart get sad over something so *silly*…

But ugh, he had never *really* stopped pining over Italy as much as he tried to convince himself that he had ceased or that… his initial feelings were just him misunderstanding both Italy and himself. Excusing his actions and fumbling with "I just don't know what having a friend is like so I got confused." Despite the fact he had never had this problem with Japan, and not now with America.

"Hey dude, penny for your thoughts?" America asked, nudging Germany's shoulder.

Ludwig jumped before hanging his head guiltily. Despite his best efforts he had gotten lost in thought. "Er… oh nothing, I was just wondering if dark blue or black is better, now that I've narrowed down my choices…"

America wasn't convinced at all, but patted Germany on the back. "Blue is the best color I think. Blue da bu dee da bu die bro."

Germany shook his head, but admired that America seemed to just say whatever odd thought or connection his mind made. His brother leaned on his shoulder, coming over from the other side.

“Yea! I think Blue suits you, and this color is close to *Prussian* blue, so you know I love it!” Gilbert declared with a grin.

Ludwig smiled. “That’s a good point. Maybe this is *the one* then.”

This ***was*** the one, he was doing something purely selfish for once. Guilt threatened to seep into him as they walked together to go through the full purchasing process. He frowned slightly, his heart beginning to beat in nervousness. He was enjoying falling into this, he really was, but it still… scared him. He was being told by everyone to chill out and be himself… but what if who he really was wasn’t…

Good enough?

He caught himself just barely reflected in one of the large windows they passed. Staring at the more youthful appearance he seemed to have for just a moment. What was he? Who was Germany? Who *was* Ludwig?

He ran a hand through his hair, letting a few strands fall loose. He liked motorcycles, maybe he liked being a little dangerous, but he also liked peaceful detail-oriented things, like engineering and baking. He liked hanging out with America and his brother. … and he was quietly in love with Italy.

And maybe as a whole… he thought about men in a way he had never managed to feel about women despite thinking he was supposed to… But he wasn’t quite ready to come to terms with what that meant or what he wanted to do with that side of himself yet.

He stared at himself and nodded, like he finally looked at his own reflection and said “Hey… I see you. There you are.”

It was then an arm was slung around his shoulder.

“Checking yourself out little bro?” Gilbert cheered, grinning at his own reflection. “I know, its hard not to stare at perfection!”

Ludwig rolled his eyes. “Whatever you say brother.”

“Nah, he’s right, we make a fine lookin’ group.” America cheered, joining them and pulled out his phone. “Selfie time!”

Ludwig was suddenly grabbed by the shirt and pulled down slightly so he was closer to Alfred’s height, the American already deciding they were going to be in a picture together before he could even try to argue, yet again hearing his brother’s laughter as background noise. Unable to help laughing himself as Alfred made different strange faces while taking multiple pictures, no doubt trying to get the perfect one.

Alfred then grabbed Gilbert and brought him in so the three of them could take some photos all together. Ludwig smiled calmly and let Alfred and Gilbert be the goofballs and take their pictures. Only intervening to calmly move them along, because he wanted to hurry up and get on his new ride dammit.

Russia stared down at his phone that he had just snapped in half with his grip and sighed. It was a bother to have to replace it, but he had seen something that had just… made him want to strangle something, and his phone was already right there in his hand.

He didn't like to admit how often he checked the posts Alfred shared in the private app for the countries to interact and share their interests freely. Alfred posted often, and truthfully, he liked seeing what America was up to.

But today he had checked. He had just barely processed a picture of America grinning as he was seemingly pulling *Germany* down, their cheeks almost touching, and they were both looking very happy. America's caption reading: *Gettin' something cool with this amazing stud LOL :P :D!*

He tried to think over why such an image had irked him so much. America looking so *happy* and cheerful, calling Germany a ‘’’stud’’ which Ivan seemed to recall Alfred saying meant "A super attractive and sexy man" back when he first began using it as American slang. Germany, a man known for not smiling very much was smiling with America.

Ivan knew the temperature in the room had dropped, and he had to put down his pen to stop from snapping that too and sending ink everywhere. He was then filled with a slight aching sadness. It was just earlier that month he had realized he would absolutely not mind an affectionate sort of relationship with the sunny man, and had lots of fun holding him and 'protecting' him from the ghosts in his video game… had he perhaps realized such feelings too late?? Would America even want such affections from him?? It was all so confusing!

He was then filled with anger towards Germany. What about this man was so interesting for America?? What was so special about him? He thought about it angrily.

Why would America choose *Germany* and not *him???*

…potentially... potentially choose Germany… its not for sure… A small inner voice tried to remind him, but it went unnoticed.

He was going to sort out these feelings somehow and get to the bottom all this confusion.

However… as far as he was concerned, Germany may just be his enemy now.

Italy silently took a moment to apologize to himself and any higher being listening for having just let out a string of angry curses. He was sounding way too much like his big brother lately! This jealousy thing was becoming a real problem on his disposition! It was even more cloudy lately when he was supposed to be a country full of sunny days!

But Germany *Germany!!!* America had posted a picture of him and Germany *together*, practically *all over him*.

Italy had not even noticed America at first because *god forgive him* but his best friend had about made him pass out, he looked so… confident and happy… and so god damned *cute* and

handsome, it had made him fly into an incoherent mess because he just wanted to kiss that man and maybe pull on his hair a little.

But no, *America had to be there too and ruin everything*.

No more mister nice Italy, all was fair in love and war! He was going to sweep Germany off his feet dammit, at least if Luddy was into America that meant he was interested in men… or at least *a* man, so maybe he actually had a chance! He was going to make that American eat his dust dammit.

This time he *fully* meant it. No alcohol or brothers to get him riled up. Just pure, unbridled desire not to loose even the smallest chance just because he had waited for too long thinking maybe Germany should make the first move.

It was too bad really that neither Russia or Italy had bothered to swipe a bit and notice all the pictures of Prussia being there too. If Gilbert knew he had gone ignored… he would absolutely take offense to it.

Coincidences

Just hearing that amazing engine roar to life made Ludwig incredibly giddy, he actually bounced a little bit in excitement. He had been training and learning with his brother on his bike, but now he had his own and it was *beautiful*.

“Holy shit dude holy shit dude this is so COOL”

Ludwig had to agree with Alfred.

“Well what are you waiting for bro? Go ham, we’ll still be here.” Gilbert encouraged.

Germany didn’t have to be told twice, he was already taking off, leaving Gilbert and Alfred hooting and hollering for him encouragingly.

Without even realizing it, he was cheering himself, completely unrestrained. He felt like he was flying as he zoomed along down the road, wind rushing past him and powerful engine chugging along.

He never wanted to *not* drive this thing, he could *not* wait to show up America in a race. He hadn’t let himself do or think anything for himself for… so long, but here he was.

He wasn’t just flying, he was *soaring*.

When he finally came back around he practically leapt on Alfred and Gilbert in excitement, all three of them laughing together as Germany let off all the excitement and adrenaline he had just experienced.

“I think he just had the time of his life or something.” Alfred suggested to Gilbert with a grin.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen him this happy.” Gilbert agreed, ruffling his brother’s hair affectionately, looking genuinely elated for him, no extra bravado added.

“It was freeing.” Ludwig agreed, before pulling Alfred into another hug. “Thank you… for getting me to do this Alfred.”

Alfred hugged him back with a grin. “Hey, it was always in ya, you just needed a gentle nudge to let yourself do it.”

“You’re right.” Ludwig agreed, patting Alfred’s back before pulling away. “I don’t just feel happy, I feel like…” he blushed, overwhelmed by the cheerful feelings. “I feel like I’m finding myself.”

“We love to hear that.” Alfred beamed happily at Germany, feeling like he did a really good thing. “It’s not all bad being ‘young’. That’s how I felt after I became independent. Its like, I finally stepped out of this feeling of what I was “supposed” to be, and then… even if it isn’t always smooth, its nice to find out who you are, right?”

Ludwig nodded. “Yeah, I’m seeing the importance of it now, you’ve also… given me a new definition of ‘maturity’ I think, it feels counter-intuitive but… it feels *right*.”

Alfred stood a little taller from Germany’s comment, feeling extra confidence in himself that had faltered over the years.

They suddenly heard a sniffling sound, and looked over to Gilbert who was turned away and rubbing his eyes.

“Eh… Brother! Are you *crying*?!” Ludwig asked, moving over to his brother out of concern.

“No! No I just got sprite in my eyes.” Gilbert defended, making a shooing motion with his hand. “Continue being adorable friends that are too pure to look at.”

Ludwig huffed and hugged his brother’s head. “Your ridiculous East.”

“N-No you.” Gilbert defended between sniffles.

But that was *totally* sprite that appeared out of nowhere and got into his eyes, not any sort of tears.

The normal Italy wouldn’t have even conceived of trying to do something like this, but he was not normal Italy right now. He was lovestruck and jealous Italy! Even if he wasn’t a strong country, he couldn’t just let Germany go without showing him all he had to offer *and maybe telling America to screw off*.

If… if at least he tried, and Germany still chose America… at least he knew he had done his best, and he could… let Germany go.

The problem was America was a superpower, a big and scary country, if he was going to even have a chance… he needed to get advice from the one other country that didn’t buckle to America easy, and also wasn’t super mean like England.

So he was actually seeking him out as him and the other countries were arriving in Moscow since Russia himself was hosting this time.

Little did he know, Russia was also looking for him for similar, but different reasons.

Russia was looking for the little Italian because he knew far more about romance than he did, not to mention he did not make him as uncomfortable as France and his bluntness could. He needed to know how to win his American’s heart! And also figure out how to even tell if America liked him or not.

So they both managed to startle each other when they met eyes across the room and managed to both call each other’s name at the same time.

“Were you looking for me?” Russia asked.

“Yeah… I-I was actually!” Italy confirmed, fiddling with his own hands nervously.

“What amazing coincidence! I came to request your help with matters having to do with America and Germany by extension.” Russia said happily.

“Wha? Really? Because I came to ask you for help with something to do with Germany that involves America!” Italy confirmed in alarm.

Ivan cocked his head. “I am wondering… maybe we have similar interests but in opposite people?”

Italy stared at Russia before gasping. “Russia! Do you want to romance America?”

Russia buried his nose in his scarf in embarrassment, tucking one arm behind his back.

“да”

He answered simply before peeking at Italy again. “I am guessing you are romantically interested in Germany?” He asked.

Italy nodded vigorously. “Si!”

“And you also noticed the… sudden *closeness* between America and Germany?”

“…Si…” Italy confirmed, visibly drooping. “I want to try and show Germany I’m way cooler than America! I know Germany admires strength too… but I’m… scared of trying to get America away from him so I can try… I’m not intimidating at all.”

“This is true, you are small and weak, America would squash you like bug…”

Italy drooped more.

“But it is still possible to give off intimidating air without an imposing physical presence!” Russia encouraged.

“Re-Really?” Italy asked hopefully.

“Yes… perhaps we can strike deal? You will teach me ways of “romance” and I will teach you intimidation and how to at least appear like you are strong for the sake of impressing Germany? We can also work together to grab their attention away from each other and towards us.” Ivan suggested, battle plan already forming.

Italy felt for a moment like he was making a deal with the devil… but Russia was still a nice guy, so maybe the devil was… an unfair comparison? Though… he’d always been told you could be easily tempted and not see that kind of evil when it’s right before you!

Despite all those worries, he took a gulp and nodded. “Si. It’s a deal.” He agreed.

“Wonderful!” Russia cheered. “I knew making friends with you would not be bad idea!”

Italy was still shaken by the giant man, but in this sort of situation… he couldn't help but agree.

So, their deal had been made, and they started with their first quick little lessons with each other. Italy had taught him the art of using compliments *very* generously.

"You know when you get those overwhelming feelings when you see them? And you can't help but think about how cute and perfect they are? You just say all those things out loud! But not too loudly or intensely or you might scare them, there's a balance to strike." Italy explained.

Ivan took notes in his pocket notebook very carefully.

Teaching Italy to try and give an intimidating look was a bit more difficult.

Ivan tried to see if he could do a creepy smile first, but no matter how Italy strained, he could not seem to stop looking cheery and sunny. So, it seemed that wouldn't work.

"Try tilting your head down and look upward. Do not smile. You are trying to glare not look derranged." Ivan advised.

Italy followed his instructions, but still seemed to want to look around or move awkwardly, that would have to be worked on. Ivan hummed and analyzed the Italian's glare.

"It is not bad, you may be able to get by on the novelty of such a look coming from you, but it will wear off fast." Ivan commented thoughtfully. "You will want to use sparingly."

Italy rolled his neck back and rubbed it as if having an intense intimidating gaze had actually put a strain on it. "Sparingly… got it, that's good for a first lesson!" He said thankfully, already smiling again.

"I agree, this was good start." Ivan encouraged.

They agreed to meet again later as more countries arrived or came down to the hotel lobby as well to mingle.

Italy looked around for Germany, having to stop himself from fainting *again* because Germany was wearing that leather jacket he had been wearing in that picture, just zipped up. It was practically criminal how nice it looked on him. His *problem* was that Germany was talking to America.

Italy cracked his knuckles in anticipation and stretched his neck out. He hadn't gotten here early for once to find Russia without reason. Time to put plan A for impressing Germany and showing him his kind of love into action.

Closeness

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

America crossed his arms and tried not to laugh as he watched Italy collide into Germany and pull him into a hug.

“Luddy! I missed you so much this month, and look at you! So handsome! You look like you could be on a magazine or something!” Italy praised, Germany responding with flailing arms from being hugged suddenly and the complements.

Alfred shook his head. There was *no way* Italy didn’t like Germany like that. Ludwig always seemed to say “that’s just how Italy is” but come on dude-skis, he’s a *certain kinda way* around Germany specifically.

“I… uh… oh, thank you Italy.” Ludwig stammered.

Italy moved so his head was on Germany’s shoulder as he smiled at him and hugged his waist.

Holy shit dude, Ludwig, how can you not think this guy has the hots for you? Alfred decided they’d have to talk about it later.

“You should of seen him on the new motorcycle he got if ya like him now!” Alfred chirped encouragingly.

“Ooohhhh Germany, you got a motorcycle??” Italy asked, incredibly interested. “Is that the ‘fun thing’ you were getting in that post America shared?”

“Oh, yeah, I was actually going to ask you if you wanted to see it this weekend.” Germany offered, turning away slightly.

“Of course! I’d love to see! I bet its super fun to drive around too!” Italy said before his gaze shifted to a certain kind of *look.* “Maybe you could give me a ride too!”

Ludwig sputtered and Alfred started laughing. Even if Germany couldn’t see the same expression on Italy’s face that he could to confirm, it was just funny to see for sure Italy wasn’t quite as innocent as everyone made him out to be. Alfred rolled his eyes, of course he wouldn’t be. If Italy’s version of ‘the talk’ with France, was anything like the one he had gotten, he definitely wasn’t that innocent. Alfred’s mind also wandered as he started humming “Oops I did it again” internally.

“I er, yes, I um yes, I can…. Uh… do that.” Ludwig coughed, his ears turning red along with the rest of his face as Italy chuckled.

“He was having the time of his life the other day man, it was awesome.” Alfred added happily.

“Oh… I’m so glad to hear that!” Italy replied.

Then the oddest thing happened, Italy’s gaze shifted over to him and soured. Was… Was *Italy glaring at him???*

He stared back completely perplexed for a moment and the sunny small country suddenly putting out a Russia-like dark aura, it didn’t match him in the slightest, and *definitely* wasn’t as intimidating, but it was certainly shocking. Ludwig didn’t even seem to notice, still blushing his brains out.

Alfred tilted his head slightly, questioningly, wondering if he had done or said something wrong. He then had a thought, and wanted to smack his head. Did Italy maybe think he had been trying to come on to Germany?? Well shoot!!!

He turned away and took a step back away from Germany casually.

Well this would never do, he had to set the record straight right this second! Right as he opened his mouth to speak, suddenly there were a large pair of arms resting on his shoulders and a head placed on top of his own. His heart leapt, he’d recognize who those hands he imagined holding belonged to anywhere!

“Привет little America!” Russia greeted.

America completely forgot what he had been doing or talking to and tilted his head back to look up at Russia with a big grin.

“Hey big guy! What’s cookin’?”

Russia furrowed his brows at him. “I do not think anything is cooking? Are you hungry little one? There may be time to go eat before we have to suffer through long meeting filled with yelling and bad times if you would like.”

“Huh? Oh, no I didn’t mean it like that, it basically is a way of saying ‘What’s up’, but now that you mention it, I wouldn’t mind getting something to keep the ‘ol bloodsugar up.”

An excuse to hang out with Russia? And Russia was offering? Oh hell to the fuck yeah.

“Very well, let us go quickly then.” Ivan encouraged, leading America with a hand on his shoulder.

Ludwig watched Alfred wander off with Ivan and shook his head, Alfred seemed more than happy to drop everything for Ivan these days. It was sweet to watch how excited he got when Russia showed up. He hoped maybe Russia felt the same way, they’d be a good match.

He turned his attention to Italy who was still holding onto him. Normally he might have shrugged him off by now, but maybe he was being a little selfish and let was okay with Italy staying like this with him.

“Hey, Germany, you’re letting me hug you longer than usual!” Italy commented.

Ludwig didn’t want to admit how close he was to letting out an odd noise when Italy tightened his hug a little bit.

“Ah… well I’ve never actually minded that much, I was just…” He coughed. “Too worried about the perception of others in past…” He admitted slowly.

Feli tilted his head a little bit. “Hmmm… I think if someone was mean to you because you were getting a hug maybe they have some issues…”

Ludwig chuckled, reaching around and encouraging Feli to rotate around to hug him from the front so he could meet his eyes. “I suppose that’s a good point.”

Feli smiled back up at him. Ludwig felt his mind go a little blurry as he stared back him. He loved those little dimples that appeared so often when he smiled, he loved those light freckles on that sun-kissed skin… those honey -colored eyes were fiery and soothing all at the same time. It didn’t make sense to him at all, but he felt that familiar longing settling in again that caused his heart to beat in his ears, made him want to just kiss the other man and run away at the same time.

“I really like your hair like this Germany, it looks so soft, can I touch it?” Italy asked, and Germany barely even managed to recognize that anything had been said.

“Oh sure…” He bent his head down a little bit.

What was he doing? He was practically asking Italy to toy with his emotions at this point! Hello, yes, man that I am having more and more trouble hiding the fact that I adore with everything in me but don’t want to ruin our friendship… please, sink your fingers into my hair like a partner might do despite the fact *we’re not partners*.

“*I’m torturing myself; I’m really torturing myself.*”

He made himself stand incredibly still and closed his eyes as those long fingers ran so softly through his hair, feeling the texture and the way it fell carefully.

“Wahhhh! I’m mad at you Germany! You had such soft nice feeling hair this whole time and I never knew!” Italy teased.

“Hnng… sorry…” Ludwig replied with a slight huff through his nose.

“I’ve decided, I’m banning you from ever using hair gel again.” Italy said with a determined nod.

Ludwig opened his eyes and raised an eyebrow. “You’re *banning* me hmm?”

“Si, keeping this from the world is a crime.” Italy declared.

“Well, I suppose I don’t want to be a criminal.” Ludwig replied with a bashful smirk.

Italy was… complimenting him a lot today. He certainly didn't hate it… not at all.

Alfred was over the moon just walking with Russia. Damn, he was really whipped wasn't he? Well, might as well enjoy the ride and hope he wouldn't get his heart broken and fall flat on his face.

As they walked through the hotel to get something quick to nosh, Alfred really wanted to do something like… hold Ivan's hands, or lean against him, or maybe even just scale him like a tree and ride around on his shoulders to see what being that tall was like. But he wouldn't… there were other countries around, and if Ivan wasn't into him too, he might get pissed and start another cold war, except Alfred felt like if that happened, he might be too depressed to fight back this time.

"Ah… your hair looks um… especially… ….. …. Blonde…" Ivan said suddenly.

Alfred wrinkled his nose and slowly turned to look at Russia in confusion. "Uh… thanks, I guess? It's all natural you know."

"Yes." Ivan confirmed simply. "It um, would be wouldn't it, haha…"

Alfred blinked a few times, was Russia drunk or something? Or sober? He could never figure out how it worked with that guy. He seemed to drink Vodka all the time because it "helped blood flow" or somethin'.

"Yeah…" He confirmed, pushing his hands that felt a little cold into his pockets. "ha."

Damn, it was really awkward all of the sudden. He heard a slight panicked rustling of paper, and Alfred looked over to see Russia hurriedly checking some sort of notebook before clearing his throat and tucking it away.

He didn't speak again until they entered the room made for getting coffee and your basic breakfast fix-ins, which seemed to already be empty.

"Ah… you're… a very attractive male human." Ivan stammered, looking like he wanted to burry his whole head in his scarf.

Alfred stared at him blankly. Brain short-circuiting.

"*A very attractive male human*."

Number one, what a way to tell someone you like how they look, number two… was Russia coming onto him??? Or was this one of those things where he was trying to be nice to a friend and didn't understand how?

"*A very attractive male human*."

Alfred couldn't help it, he burst out laughing. "Thanks, you're not so bad yourself dude."

For a moment he thought Russia almost looked a little dejected. “Thank you, America.” He responded flatly. “You are very kind.”

Alfred took off his glasses and rubbed a tear away from his eyes. “Christ, I love the way you say things sometimes.” He wheezed.

Ivan turned pink.

“Anyway dude, you feelin’ okay today? Not short on vodka or anything?” Alfred commented, happily acquiring a bagel and spinning it in his hand before finding the cream cheese and capers to deck it out with.

Russia sighed. “No. I have plenty, thankfully.”

Alfred hummed. He was sure something was up, but hey, if Ivan didn’t want to tell him he couldn’t make him.

Alfred chewed on his bagel snack calmly, eyeballing Russia toying with the hem of his scarf and wondering if he was going to eat something too or… he had just wanted to come with him…

“I feel like maybe I am not being direct…” Ivan began.

Alfred raised an eyebrow and tilted his head. Maybe Ivan *was* going to tell him what was wrong.

“I… I think…” Ivan tried to start, swallowing hard. “You… I…”

Alfred was starting to get worried, Ivan looked pale, unsettled, and like he might just faint. He’d never seen Russia look unstable before and it was seriously worrying him.

“He-Hey… whatever it is you need to tell me, I won’t be upset or judgmental or some crap, okay?” Alfred tried to offer out of worry.

Ivan’s chest heaved before he suddenly buried his whole face in his scarf for real this time, covering his face as he wailed slightly. “I do not understand why this is difficult!” He wheezed, voice muffled through the fabric.

Alfred put his bagel down and hurriedly rushed to grab Ivan’s hands and gently pull them away from his face. “Woah, dude it’s okay, some things are hard to say, it’s okay!”

He tried to ignore the fact his heart was pounding in his ears. The way Ivan was acting, having trouble saying something *just called him ‘very attractive male human’*… could he… maybe???

Ivan slowly peeked at him. “I… I am attempting to flirt with you and failing miserably. I was told to be direct, but I am bad at this it seems.”

Alfred’s face heated up. “You… you were trying to flirt with me?”

“Yes…” Ivan suddenly looked ashamed and turned away. “I’m sorry.”

Alfred panicked as it looked Ivan would try to leave in a panic, pulling away from the light grasp Alfred had on his wrists.

“Hang on!” Alfred said in a hurry, tightening his grip and pulling a startled Russia back to him. “I… I don’t mind you trying to flirt with me…”

Ivan’s eyes widened. “You do not?!”

“No, not at all…” Alfred practically trembled with excitement before beaming up at Ivan. “I like you too, like *really* like you.”

Ivan stared forward completely dazed. “You… like me too?”

Alfred nodded excitedly.

Alfred’s elation then turned to pure panic as the giant Russian man lost consciousness and collapsed on the ground.

Seemed the one thing that could conquer Russia was overwhelming emotions.

Chapter End Notes

Russia.exe ran into a problem and has to reboot

At Last

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alfred was looking around the room and back down at Ivan, mind going a million miles per minute. He crouched down next to the 6'7" man who had just straight up *collapsed*.

"*What do I do what do I do?? What the fuck I straight up broke him???"*

He shook the man a little. "Hey… Hey Russia…. Come on dude, you can't just yeet out like that after we had a moment! I wanna do cute boyfriend stuff with you!" He pleaded.

Nope, Ivan was really out cold.

"Uh…"

Alfred in another moment of panic laid down next to Ivan, maybe in a weird moment of "Well at least he shouldn't be lonely down here?"

He grabbed Ivan's limp hand and examined it, slapping it around a little bit. "Ivaaaaannnnnnnnnnnnn!" He complained, flopping to lay on top of the man's chest and press his ear to it.

Okay, heart still beating, he legit just… fainted.

Alfred glared at him. "Okay dude, wake up, I'd do the whole princely thing and wake you up with a kiss but I want you to look at me and be like… *awake* when we first kiss??"

Still nothing.

Alfred sat up again and shook Russia's shoulders. "Come on dude! You're freaking me out! Most people don't faint for more than a minute, I mean I know we're countries and all, so maybe its different. Oh GOD WHAT IF YOUR OUT FOR LIKE A MINUTE IN COUNTRY TERMS? WHAT IS THAT? 50 YEARS??"

"AlfreD caN yOu PleAse Be stoP shaking Me??"

Alfred looked down from his panic to find a disoriented Russian that had finally woken up and immediately threw his arms around him. "Ivan! You're awake! Don't scare me like that bro!" He lectured.

"I am sorry, I became overwhelmed." He replied, patting Alfred's back awkwardly.

Alfred let go so Ivan and him could stand up.

"Geeze dude, what a way to react to someone telling you they like you." Alfred commented, puffing out his cheeks a little.

“…considering our history, I had been preparing for quite some time for rejection.” Ivan said, pushing his pointer fingers together to do something with his hands.

“Psh, dude, honestly I’ve had the biggest crush on you since you helped me out back during the Civil War.” Alfred said, rubbing his neck and shifting back and forth on his feet.

“Th-That long?” Ivan stammered. “And you have been aware of your own feelings??”

“Yeah…”

“Oh… Why did you not say anything?” Ivan asked, his face turning the cutest shade of pink Alfred had ever seen.

“I mean… both our countries…. The whole world in fact… have been *pretty* homophobic for a long time, and I mean, I felt like I was dropping mad hints, but I think ya might have missed them, so I thought you weren’t interested.” Alfred rambled.

“This is true…” Ivan mumbled. “It makes me sad, this means I can not take you out in my own country.”

Alfred beamed at him. “Already thinking of date ideas, huh?”

“I… Well…”

“It’s okay dude, I have a list a mile long already. And hey… maybe one day things will change in your country, and we can be out here too.” He offered, reaching up and squeezing Ivan’s shoulder a little.

Ivan finally stopped hiding his face so he could look at Alfred properly and smiled a little. “Your optimism makes me feel very warm Alfred. I look forward to what your… ‘date’ plans are.”

Alfred wanted to jump up and down like a puppy. Ivan liked him, Ivan was excited to go on dates with him! It was then Ivan’s hand came down on his head and pat it. Alfred looked up at him practically starry eyed.

“I feel much more able to compliment you now I know I will not be rejected! So I will do so! You were making very cute expression just now.”

Alfred seriously felt like pulling a “no you” because what the actual fuck that was such a cute and sweet thing to say and it was coming out of Ivan’s mouth, Ivan really liked him? He hadn’t fully processed that, he *really* liked him? It felt like a dream, an amazing dream.

So instead, Alfred just faceplanted into Ivan’s chest. “Dude… your gonna give me a figurative heart-attack saying stuff like that.”

He said figurative because he thought Ivan might take it literally and get worried. That seemed to be the right choice, because in response, he was hugged tightly.

Alfred was content to just stay right there, but then he remembered where they were.

“Shit, what time is it?” He mumbled into Ivan’s chest.

Ivan looked around for a clock before remembering his phone.

“Oh… we are now 15 minutes late to meeting.” Ivan said sheepishly.

“Well… you know what, party don’t start until Russia and America walk in.” Alfred said, pulling away reluctantly.

“The meetings being a party would be more enjoyable, at least then many countries would be too drunk to grate on my nerves.” Ivan said honestly, following America out as they charged toward the meeting room.

Alfred laughed before looking back and up at him. “*Dude*, maybe we should have regular parties. Great for world relations, and whaddya want to bet we’d actually get more done?”

Ivan tilted his head thoughtfully. “You know… I recognize joking tone, but there may actually be something to this suggestion. Though, maybe I’m just tired of meetings.”

“Honestly, who *isn’t* tired of them?” Alfred pointed out.

“…you have gotten me there.”

Meanwhile:

Italy felt at least a little bit successful. Germany had let him touch his hair, and he and Russia had tag-teamed successfully! So now he could talk to Germany one on one!

“So, so Germany! Where did you get the cool jacket?” He asked, trying to strike up conversation as they walked side by side.

“Oh, my brother gave it to me! Er… I brought a shirt to switch into before the meeting of course but…” Ludwig explained.

“You could always keep it on! You could be all like ‘screw those silly dress code rules’!” Italy joked, though he was also slightly being a little selfish because he wanted him to keep it on.

Ludwig raised his eyebrows. “Italy, you realized I helped *set* the dress code… right?”

Italy could feel his soul drain out of his body and try to retreat. “…did I say silly? Haha… oopsie… I meant… amazing… No need to screw them….” He stammered, starting to not feel very suave again.

Ludwig snorted and laughed. He had such a base-y laugh and voice… it just…. *Did* things to him sometimes, and Luddy laughing… was a beautiful sight and sound. He wanted to make him laugh and smile lots.

“I suppose they *are* a little outdated at this point. Though I don’t know if I’m feeling *that* rebellious yet.”

Feliciano laughed. “That’s fair enough. I guess it just looks so good on you I wanted to find an excuse for you to keep it on!” He confessed.

Ludwig turned red again. “O-Oh…”

They walked in silence again, and Feli just enjoyed the flustered look on his face.

“H-Hey, Italy?” Ludwig began slowly.

“Si?”

“You’ve been… complimenting me a lot these past few years, and especially in the last month.” Ludwig slowed his pace and stopped, Italy stopping with him. “Why… Why is that?” He asked while looking down.

Italy began panicking, wondering if he had gone too far, wondering if maybe Ludwig was about to say something like “You’re flirting with me? A man? I hate you now!” even if that didn’t seem like a very Germany thing to say as well as something unnatural for really anyone to say.

“Oh no! Should… Should I not? I’m sorry don’t hate me!” Italy pleaded, heart pounding away in his chest.

Ludwig’s head shot up. “No! No I…. I wouldn’t hate you over something like that. I don’t… mind exactly, I just want to know things like… why… and if you’re… only doing it to me… or if this is just how you interact with everyone.”

Ludwig was looking at him now with almost *pleading* in his eyes, and Feli almost felt himself getting lost in them.

“…Because I want to compliment you Luddy, because it’s the truth, because every time I do it comes right from the heart!” He explained. “…and compliments like that… I only give to you…”

Feli felt like the confidence was draining from him the longer he stood there in the silence that fell between them in the middle of the hall.

“You… why… only me?” Ludwig pressed.

Feli looked into his eyes, Ludwig was still blushing lightly, with that same pleading face feeling like… maybe if Ludwig didn’t hear something specific his heart might break and shatter into a million tiny pieces. His heart skipped a beat. Did… Did Ludwig maybe…?

He opened his mouth to speak. “Ludwig… I…”

…Only to be interrupted by a small angry British voice. “Oi! You two, the meeting starts in five minutes! Stop lollygagging about!” He lectured, despite moving away from the room.

Italy theorized he was actually looking for America, and was more ready to lecture him, and they just happened to be standing there. Italy said several curses under his breath in Italian, turning away from Germany in defeat. Damn these stupid meetings, damn everyone else around him, everything always seemed to get in the way…

Just then… Germany grabbed his hand and stopped him. Italy turned back to him, blinking a few times. Ludwig didn't usually like being late and unprepared for things, and he still had to switch his shirt out for said meeting… but maybe…

"Germany?" He questioned, eyes flicking down to their hands and back up to Germany who was staring forward, frozen… before he clenched his jaw, looking like he just resolved something internally.

Germany suddenly turned, Italy in tow and began sprinting with him, away from the meeting room, away from the other countries, upstairs to where they were all supposed to have rooms, and outside to the balcony high up above everything. All Feli could do was let himself be led… not like he had any desire not to follow this man wherever he went.

They stopped, and Ludwig slowly let go of his hand when he was sure they were alone. He then heaved and looked him in the eye once more.

"Feli… what were you going to say?"

Feliciano stared back completely stunned, shivering a little bit, not knowing if it was actually that cold or he just had adrenaline coursing through him. It was hard to know when them being in Russia, but in Russia during the summer.

Germany was willing to skip a meeting and run off with him… to hear what he had to say?

Ludwig swallowed as Feliciano accidently left him in silence for a moment. "Please… I need to know…"

He almost looked like he was in pain awaiting an answer. Italy swelled with confidence and determination, feeling like he could finally find the words he wanted… no… *needed* to say.

"I'm… in love with you." He confessed plainly. "I think I have been for a very long time now."

Italy was almost scared to look at Germany for fear of something like anger or rejection, despite feeling more hopeful that that wouldn't be the case… but he made himself do so anyway, only for his heart to stop and eyes to widen as he realized Ludwig's eyes were growing wet as they teared up.

He reached out with worry to touch his cheek, only to have Germany lean into his hand and cover it with his own so sweetly. Ludwig breathed out shakily as a small smile of something like relief or elation washing over him.

"I love you too… I have for almost as long as I've known you."

The words stunned him.

“You…” Italy felt himself get all teary eyed too, now cupping Ludwig’s other cheek as well and bringing their heads together, foreheads touching as they shared a sort of quiet laugh, feeling silly for having been pining for so long without confessing.

Italy pulled back just a little bit, brushing a loose hair out of Germany’s face, gazing on this man that he loved so much, feeling like he was floating. He had forgotten how… *wonderful* requited love felt.

Feli noticed Ludwig’s eyes flick down to his lips and back up to his eyes. He chuckled; glad they had the same thought. He pulled Ludwig down a little more, and gently pressed their lips together. Softly, slowly, letting his poor awkward German who fumbled with his hands a little before letting them settle on Italy’s sides just under his arms that were now wrapped around his neck. Hoping to convey with that kiss that it was okay… they were both okay… this was real…

He felt Germany shiver as he started trying to kiss back and hug Italy a little tighter to him. Feli gently took the lead and deepened the kiss, just trying to convey every little thing he loved about him without having said all the words yet. Germany followed suit, it felt like they were both trying to say so much that had gone unsaid, like they were trying to make up for years and years of trying to be together and missing by a mile in one kiss, even though they knew now there would be *so* many more to come.

When they finally parted, they were both a little short on breath and flushed. They simply stood together so they could come off the high of what just happened and reflect a little.

Feli was starting to feel more and more silly by the second.

“I didn’t think you…” They both managed to say at the same time before laughing.

“I didn’t think you liked me like that, I thought maybe all the flirting and the hugs and the kisses were just… you being *you*.” Ludwig confessed, eyes darting between Italy and the wall shyly.

Feli hummed and played with one of the zippers on Ludwig’s jacket. “I can see how you could feel that… I guess for a long time I was flirting with girls wherever we would go.” Which he totally hadn’t been doing more often than was natural for him to compensate for anything… maybe they could have that conversation later…

Feli thought for a moment. “Wait!! Germany, that valentines day, that you said was a misunderstanding, when you said “flirting when you got me”…” Feli clapped his hand over his mouth. “Were… were you trying to tell me you liked me that day?”

Ludwig turned red. “Of course I was…”

“WAH?! I was already feeling silly that I got jealous of America and now I feel even more silly!!” He wailed, wanting to smack his own head a few times, or possibly burry it in the sands of a beach somewhere.

“What else would the flowers and going to dinner have meant?”

“I don’t know! I thought you were angry at me that whole night and I wasn’t sure what I did! I thought maybe you found out about the fettuccine sauce I had spilled on the carpet!”

Ludwig gaped at him. “On the carpet??? Where?” He then shook his head, feeling like maybe that wasn’t the most important detail. “Hang on… jealous of *America*???? What do you mean?”

Feli felt a little bad like maybe he had dumped too much new info on him.

“Well… you started hanging out a lot more, he knew things about you that I didn’t…”

“Like I said, that was a coincidence, it just hadn’t come up before.”

“Russia said he saw you and America taking off each other’s clothing in the hall.”

“Verdammt… Russia... was exaggerating, all that happened was America was trying to get me to ‘dress down’ so we could go somewhere more casual… *platonically*.”

“Oh…” Italy said timidly. “There was also that picture of you together where you were really close together and all happy…” He said, feeling sheepish and like he was grasping at straws now he was saying it out loud.

“Gilbert was in those photos too?” Ludwig pointed out.

Italy looked up in a panic. “Gilbert was there too???”

Ludwig gave him a stern look. “Don’t let *him* hear you say that.”

Italy clutched his head and put his head against the wall in embarrassment. “I can’t believe it! I’ve been acting so foolish! Here I was ready to fight America to prove myself to you and it wasn’t even an issue! Jealousy clouded my brain so baaaaaaad!!!”

“YOU WERE GOING TO TRY AND FIGHT AMERICA???” Ludwig shouted, demanding an answer immediately as he made a scary angry face.

“I’M SORRRYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY I PROMISE I WONT TRY AND FIGHT YOUR NEW FRIEND. I KNEW I SHOULD HAVE JUST STUCK WITH BEING HAPPY FOR YOU BUT I HAD TO GO AND THINK SOMETHING ELSE! BUT IT WOULD BE SO BAD OF ME TO FIGHT A FRIEND OF YOURS! I’d be such a jerk! I’ve been such a jerk! I’ll apologize to America ASAP!!”

Ludwig grabbed Italy’s shoulders and sighed to calm them both down. “No No, it’s not that… it’s just…. *Italy he would have destroyed you*.”

Italy paused, suddenly offended. “I could have taken him on! I can be cool and strong too!” He defended stubbornly.

Ludwig stared at him blankly. “Italy… you can’t be serious…”

Italy tried to puff out his chest to look a little bigger. “I’m totally serious!”

"…Italy… you could *not* take on America. He's *America*, the only one who could even have a shot is *Russia*."

"….I guess that's true… but even so! It would have been lame to not even try right?"

Ludwig sighed. "Italy, you don't need to prove your strength to me. It's sweet in its own way that you want to go that far for me, but it's unnecessary, and I do prefer you all in one piece." He said, affectionately running his hands through Italy's hair.

Italy shifted his feet. "I guess… I mean I know its my own problem but… my brother and I both… we have a lot to live up to, so sometimes… when I run away, or don't fight my own battles…" He rubbed his arm. "And Germany, I've relied on you so much. I think I got jealous of America because he managed to form a relationship where you felt comfortable to let down your guard a little, and I was mad at myself for not doing that for you because… because maybe you felt like you had to protect me…"

"Italy…" Ludwig began, voice softening further. "I understand, feeling like you have a lot of expectations on you, but you're strong in other ways that I admire. You've stayed optimistic and friendly despite everything, you've allowed yourself to still enjoy simple things in life. And… frankly, I think it takes more strength to choose not to fight than to give into aggression. And I still think you're the strongest person I know when it comes to that, even if you've faltered a little bit due to envy… but I can't say I don't understand as when I saw you flirting with girls it would piss me off…" Ludwig said, speaking earnestly.

Italy quietly reached out and held Germany's hand in appreciation as he continued.

"As for the idea that your worried I'm not comfortable acting myself around you because of wanting to protect you… it's not true. Out of all the countries I've felt pressured to act a certain way by, if you can believe it, you're the one I've felt the least pressure from. Yes, you get yourself into trouble, but you've *always* advocated for me to relax and slow down, and you *have* gotten me to enjoy more things even when I was being stubborn." Ludwig used their interlocked hands to pull Italy a little closer to him again.

"The reason America has had an impact is *because* he's one of the only other countries that's had the experience of growing up as fast as I did. Its because of that unique perspective that he was simply able to phrase it in a way that finally made sense to me, and made me feel like 'yeah… it is unfair for me to be taking on so much and missing out on what freedom I do have… what I *could* have', but you know, I couldn't have come to that conclusion if it weren't for you…" Ludwig looked at Feli sincerely. "Because you already planted that seed in me a long time ago."

It was Italy's turn to end up bright red at Germany's words. "Really?" He stammered.

"Really, Really… you dramatic dummkopf." Ludwig teased with a small smile. "I can't believe you thought I'd be in love with *America*, of all people."

"It sounds more and more stupid the more I think about it." Italy said. "I guess I am a *little* dramatic."

Ludwig raised both eyebrows. “A little?”

“… Really dramatic.” He admitted, jokingly lightly slapping the side of his own head.

Ludwig chuckled and planted a kiss on his forehead. Italy happily returned the gesture with a kiss planted on the tip of Germany’s nose.

Dear lord he loved this man so much, and holy shit it was so bad that it took them this long.

Chapter End Notes

It's about time

Celebration

Chapter Summary

Bonding over the excitement of finally getting together on both sides

America rushed into the meeting room with Russia, fully preparing himself as he sat down to have the first thing he heard be England getting on him for being late. Only to hear…. Nothing? He looked around for the British bulldog in the shape of a human, he was sitting in his seat, but he just… didn't say anything??

Huh…

Well, no matter. America gave his signature smile and salute. "Sorry for being late ya'll but the hero had important business to attend to!"

"Actually America, we were just discussing on if we should adjourn the meeting, Germany and Italy haven't showed up, but we weren't sure since Russia is hosting and everything." France explained casually.

Wait, Germany and Italy weren't there? Yeah… they weren't. Ludwig playing hooky with Feliciano… that certainly boded well for them finally hooking up! He hoped that was the case.

Russia glanced to America. "I would not mind postponing, something has… ah… come up, for me anyway that needs my attention."

Alfred's stomach fluttered as Ivan glanced at him with a coy little smile. Hell yeah! Screw the meeting! New boyfriend time! He couldn't agree more!

Most of the other countries seemed to agree, but at this point and with the state of everything, moral was pretty low anyway. Maybe he *would* propose his party idea… and if Ivan backed him and helped everyone else see his point, maybe even if it wasn't a full on party, or if it didn't replace the meetings, maybe it would help everyone, it wasn't as if they could really affect policy anyway as much as they'd like to. Chill vibes for everyone, maybe they all needed it. Maybe even England wouldn't be so grouchy and high strung… and obsessed with 'keeping up appearances'.

He inwardly cringed thinking about the time England visited after not seeing him for ages, only to get ragged on for what he was wearing, told if he didn't wear a stuffy suit everywhere England wouldn't want to be seen with him. He huffed, hating how much that had even affected him, and reminded himself to not think about it and not give a shit.

Everyone began filtering out of the room, and Alfred decided to gently grab onto Ivan's hand under the table to comfort himself and get his mind back on a happier track. Ivan squeezed back, and it immediately put him on cloud nine.

He then got out his phone, deciding to text his bestie about the good news.

"Hey Ger-dude! Hope you and Italy are having fun ;)) meeting is canceled, don't think anyone was feeling it today LOL. Best part of today though is I totally bagged myself a tall, dark and handsome Russian boyfriend :D!!! He likes me back! He actually likes me! Isn't that cool?? But dude, have I got a story for you when we hang out again. Ttyl! Oh, also tell Italy I gotta talk to him at some point, I think he might have thought you and me were doing the frickle frackle dance or somethin' lolololololol"

He tucked his phone away, heading out with Russia, nearly forgetting to let go of his hand so they could leave the room they just got into.

"Were you texting Germany by chance America?" Russia asked as they walked.

"Oh, Yeah! I haven't heard anything back yet though, I just type a lot, so I'm not sure what's up." He explained.

"I must express relief that it seems you are just friends, or I might have crushed someone innocent!" Russia said way too cheerfully.

"Wha? No way! Were you thinking Germany was putting the moves on me before you could?"

Russia paused for a moment. "Perhaps…"

Alfred smacked his own head. "You and Italy both, I swear. Its funny because when we'd hang, I brought you up a bunch and he brought up Italy, and I was totally rooting for Germany to snag some Italian sausage!"

Russia raised both his eyebrows comically high. "Italian sausage??? *Oh* I see, that kind of sausage."

Alfred snorted. "Yeah that kind." He shook his head. "But really, yeah, Germany is totally a stud-muffin, but he's like… I don't know, like a bro, you know? And I like you too much." He said cheerfully.

"Stud-muffin…" Russia mumbled. "You say oddest things America, but I enjoy it."

Alfred laughed. "Well good, because it can only get odder from here."

Ivan chuckled. "I will be looking forward to it."

They walked back into the lobby and Ivan hummed thoughtfully. "I wonder where we could go…I suppose we are limited while we are here…"

Alfred thought for a moment before snapping his fingers. “We could always go back to one of our rooms and watch a movie or somethin’!” He suggested.

Ivan nodded. “Yes, this would offer privacy. Let us go to my room… it is nicest because it is… my country.”

Alfred followed him gleefully. “You skimping out on rooms for the rest of us? Huh comrade?” He teased.

“You still got rooms, didn’t you?” He commented with a smile.

“Pssh… I guess I always give myself the nicest room when I’m hosting too.” Alfred admitted with a laugh.

As soon as they were finally out of the public eye, Alfred walked a little closer next to Ivan, going so far as to shyly wrap his arms around his right arm once they were upstairs as Ivan unlocked the hotel door with his other hand. They walked in and Alfred found himself having trouble deciding whether to keep holding on to Ivan’s arm or yeet himself onto the bed, as he liked to do whenever entering a hotel room. He kind of wanted to make a pillow fort… though he was a little worried if he said that Ivan might think he was being immature. But like, pillow forts were like a right of passage for getting settled! Him and Mattie used to make them all the time. Also, screw that ‘just for kids’ stuff, setting up a fort could be comforting and relaxing dammit.

He made himself wait, the two of them taking off their shoes, and sat back onto the bed with a slight hop when he could do so while still holding Russia’s hand. Ivan let out a breath of air it seemed he had been holding in now they were finally alone and looked down at Alfred. He watched as Ivan’s pupils seemed to dilate so visibly looking at *him*... and began hearing his own heartbeat in his ears.

Then, suddenly, Ivan leaned forward, practically tackling Alfred in a hug, landing on top of the smaller nation. Alfred ‘oof-ed” at the sudden weight of this giant man on him before laughing and hugging him back. He felt Ivan nuzzle his face into his neck, Alfred smiled and took a sec to slide off his gloves he normally wore and tossed them to the side. He then experimentally pet the Russian’s head a little and gently rubbed his back as if to silently say: “well hello to you too.”

Ivan then pushed himself up to look at Alfred, who blushed a little at him looming over him like that ™.

“I wanted to give proper affection to solidify change in relationship, but I didn’t feel able to do so while we were out in a public room…” Ivan confessed sadly.

“Nice to know you were excited to tackle me like that.” Alfred said beaming up at him.

“ghh… you make such cute faces when you’re this happy, it is destroying me.” Ivan said, furrowing his brows.

Alfred reached up and grabbed Ivan's face. "Yeah, well you know you're killing me with the cute faces you make too. And you're over here all *big* and *tall* and *sweet*, you're like, the ultimate cuddle machine. You know how over the moon I was sitting in your lap that one time? I was highkey thinking of trying to seduce you into staying the night or something *if you know what I mean*."

Ivan blinked a few times before tilting his head and… *smirking??* He hadn't seen Russia do his smirk instead of his usual calm or creepy smile in a while… and holy shit it sent a shiver through his whole body.

"I would have not minded that." Ivan said calmly, letting his head fall forward a little bit.

Alfred gulped slightly, Ivan was close enough now that he could feel the breath from his nose lightly tickle his face, either… Ivan could lean forward more… or he could lean up…

He looked up into Ivan's eyes, realizing they were slightly lidded as he looked at him. He thought about all the times they had stared each other down during the cold war… trying to calculate the other's next move… it felt like that again now, except… different. Gazing at each other, trying to decide who would close that damn gap first.

Alfred had never been known for his patience. He grabbed Russia by the scarf and yanked him down, slamming his lips onto his, he'd been pining and waiting for this for too long dammit. The tension between them had been palpable for hundreds of years now, it was about time they did something about it.

Ivan felt their teeth knock together as they kissed. His previous timidness leaving him. This was happening! Both of them were unfamiliar on how to do this, it was sloppy and a little aggressive on both sides… but there was no shortage of pure, raw, emotion and affection being thrown into it.

Also… Alfred having feelings for him for so long? Knowing that he hadn't been gazing at him with pure hatred like he had maybe thought he was throughout their history… this sunny man had been wanting this for quite some time it seemed.

And… if he was being honest with himself… maybe there were many times where he confused himself, thinking he wanted to fight America, when in all scenarios he imagined 'getting physical' it was always around grabbing the man, throwing him around but not *hurting* him… pushing him up against something…

He had quietly accepted he liked men a long time ago, even if he wasn't exactly *out* for many reasons. But admitting to himself he liked America was a whole other can of worms.

As they both parted, out of breath and looking at each other in slight shock at the bout of aggressive kissing, Ivan thought back to not long ago when he had come to the conclusion that he for sure would like America to be *his* in that way … then he thought back further and almost wanted to take his own head off to examine and find what was wrong with it for not realizing his own feelings sooner.

It seemed obvious now. How he always waited for America to speak in meetings before talking himself in order to interact with him. How he'd watch the ways Alfred would goof off while the other countries fought with intrigue. How he enjoyed hearing little stories from him.

But no. He had convinced himself "I just want to be very good friends with America".

Good Friends. Denial was so strong he had really pulled a 'they seem like '"""""""good friends""""""' with his own romantic interest.

"Whatcha thinking about big guy?" Alfred asked him. Looking up at him with those wide beautiful sky-blue eyes that Ivan *swore* held the stars in them.

"I was realizing… I think I've wanted you to be mine for a lot longer than I had admitted to myself." He told him, running a curious thumb over Alfred's cheek as he cupped his face, imagining connecting little lines between the freckles that dusted them to make little constellations.

"Oh…" Alfred said, looking very flustered suddenly.

This was new territory, and it was a little scary but… it was worth it if he could now call America *his*.

Ludwig and Feliciano had ended up going back to Feli's room for celebratory wine, deciding to not even bother with the meeting at all when Ludwig felt his phone buzz in his back pocket while Italy was getting glasses for them.

He saw a message from Alfred, and ran his eyes over it. "Oh, it seems Alfred and Ivan confessed to each other as well." He looked over at Italy and smirked. "Seems your unexpected team up had benefits after all."

Italy laughed. "I guess so! You know, Russia is scary, but I actually like him a lot. Besides, if I had revolutions and fights as often as he did, I might be a little scary too, it must be exhausting!" He mused, scooting to sit next close enough to Germany so their knees touched.

"I have to agree. Oh… also it looks like Alfred caught onto your jealousy and wants to talk to you at some point."

Italy stiffened, looking up at Ludwig in horror. "Oh no! He's not mad is he??? Is he going to rip me to pieces???"

Ludwig shook his head. Italy was incredibly dramatic, but it was sort of cute and funny. "No, I think he just finds it comical. He probably just wants to clear the air with you."

Italy breathed out a sigh of relief. "Oh thank goodness!!!" He then leaned against Ludwig's shoulder and looked up at him affectionately. "I guess I should be friendly with my boyfriend's friends!" He said gleefully. "I'm glad there was nothing to get jealous about after all!"

“Nein, he’s definitely just a friend. Besides, I will just point out I’ve only been talking to America on a more friendly basis for a little over a *month*, that is not enough time for romantic feelings to develop. At least not for me. He’s objectively cute, yes…” He coughed. “But he wasn’t *you*.” He said honestly.

Italy cuddled up to him. “Aww Germany!!”

Ludwig put his arm around his new boyfriend’s shoulder and squeezed slightly.

Boyfriend.

Ludwig felt overjoyed by the term, some part of him still felt scared… and *terrified*. He was sure Italy being literally *the* catholic country would understand the feeling. Like he couldn’t fully shake off the idea of feeling *wrong* even though… how could this feeling of love and appreciation for this other person be bad? How could the waves of happiness he felt around Feliciano *possibly* be wrong.

He couldn’t put into words the pure relief he felt having finally said the words he had fumbled around for so long, knowing that Italy really, actually wanted to be with him. He had felt like, waiting for Italy’s answer, like he was on the brink of having his heart broken, but it hadn’t happened.

He had no idea how to do relationships, but he was sort of ready to let himself free fall into it. A… leap of faith if you would…

“Hey Germany, tell me every little thing you like! I want to know every little bit of you. Tell me even if you think you might have told me already!” Italy declared boldly, still looking up at *him* like he was the most gorgeous man on the planet, it was so visible in his gaze, it was starting to make him believe that maybe he could be, if only in Italy’s eyes… but Italy *was* his whole world, the world that mattered the most to him.

“Ah… I’m not sure how to talk about it…” He rubbed the back of his neck. “I like baking… you know that, though it’s one of those things when it comes to making look nice, I’m not very confident in my coordination, I feel like my hands are too clumsy… but I like detail-oriented work. I always have.”

He twiddled his thumbs a little… he hadn’t told anyone this really… only his brother knew.

“When I was a very new country, I really liked sewing stuffed animals…”

Italy gasped and practically bounced on the couch excitedly. “You know! I meant to ask you, because I heard teddy bears hand-made in Germany are some of the softest and bestest in the world!”

“Well… it’s another thing I like because it requires attention to detail and careful handiwork… especially for me at that age when I was still small. I’m not opposed to trying to do it again… even if it’s not very manly…” He said, furrowing his brows.

“Poor Germany, you worry about manliness a lot.” Italy observed.

Ludwig looked over at him, he knew he was right… he *did* worry about it a lot. It was hard not to. It was easy being honest with things that everyone saw as masculine, like his interest in engineering, but he only let a select number of people know about his baking hobby, and his brother until now was the only one who knew about his younger self's hobby for sewing cute toys.

Inwardly, he felt like the craftmanship and dedication each of these hobbies were more than worthy of recognition, but… if the rest of the world knew that about him…

"I guess I do… deep down, know it's a little silly to worry about what others think, especially nowadays, things have changed a lot, people are more open than they used to be, but the idea of being … *perceived* a certain way…"

"It's scary… I know…" Italy said, softly taking his hand. Ludwig slowly tightened his grip around it in return.

"…When I was really little, everyone thought I was a girl, not a boy. I didn't really care how I was seen at the time, I was too little to really understand the difference when it came to how you were seen and treated, and… like I said, my first love was another boy. No one bat an eye because of course they just saw puppy love between a boy and a girl." Italy began.

Ludwig looked at him attentively, come to think of it, Italy barely talked about his past at all…

"But I jumped from being a little one for so so long to closer to something like an older teen or a young adult in an instant! I was just singing to myself when it happened!" Italy explained. "My voice dropped, and it became pretty apparent I was a man, and that seemed right for me, and I still very much feel like I am a man, not a woman at all. But Hungary and Austria were so surprised!"

Ludwig blinked a few times. So Italy had grown up fast in a different sense all those years ago… this sounded like an incredibly confusing puberty to go through.

"But, you know, I was still waiting for my first love to come back, before I knew he was… …." Italy paled, and Germany's heart sank.

Had Italy fallen for a country that had dissolved? The idea of that happening to either of them while being together was a *terrifying* thought. Now… knowing Italy had lost someone like that? He knew loosing Rome had already been hard on him and Romano, but having lost someone he cared about so young like that?

"He was gone… but also, there was one day Austria took me aside, and told me that if he *did* come back, he may not like me anymore because I was a boy… and even if he did… it'd be bad… and we might get in trouble or hurt if we weren't careful."

Italy shook his head. "I didn't understand it at all! Why had it been okay when everyone thought I was a girl, but not when it turned out I was a guy? And I mean…" Italy waved his hand. "The whole catholic thing…"

“I was wondering about that.” Ludwig admitted.

“But all of that…” Italy let out a breath of air and furrowed his brows, looking at Ludwig with an odd amount of seriousness. “…Is why I’m so happy you’re letting yourself explore you being… *you*! Because I know what we’ve all been through and how we’ve been told we’re supposed to be… and I know you had a lot of pressure to be strong and follow orders all the time even when they hurt you.”

Ludwig shuffled his feet, uncrossing his legs and crossing them again, just switching what leg was on top.

“It’s unfair.” He stated calmly in response.

“It is… it is unfair.”

There was a slightly melancholy mood that hung over them, but even so, the conversation filled with revelations and honesty only made the fire that had been lit within him this month to grow in intensity. He looked at Italy, a fiery passion now shining through him.

“It’s not always going to be easy for me, but I refuse to let such outdated ideas control me anymore. Because of everything lately, I’ve felt freer and closer to seeing myself when I look at my reflection than I *ever* have, it allowed us to become closer, and… and I want to figure everything out with you by my side through it all!” He declared.

Italy’s eyes shined as he got a little carried away with his speech, but Italy seemed to appreciate every word. He set his wine glass down and tackled him with a hug.

“You’re always so cool when you get this passionate about something Luddy!” Italy praised before leaning back and kissing his head, then nose, then both cheeks. Ludwig was unable to help his nose scrunching up a little bit when it was kissed.

“You’re already such an amazing person, I’ve always admired you so much, and I’m so happy to be with you as we are now, and through whatever we do or become in the future.”

Ludwig felt the butterflies in his stomach turn to flying saucers as Italy looked at him affectionately.

The world was changing, their relationship was changing, old patterns and habits becoming… obsolete, the new unknown world… absolutely terrifying, but Ludwig felt like… as long as they were together, they could do anything.

Melting

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"So! Since we barely ever get anything done at these meetings outside of fighting, I think making our gatherings less formal would benefit everyone and help international relationships!" Alfred finished his speech, keeping his chest puffed up despite his slight nervousness the other nations would laugh off his proposal.

Italy raised his arm excitedly. "ooohhh! We could have one where we all bring food from our countries! It could be a fun cultural exchange! And what brings people together better than food?"

Italy totally got it! Heck yeah! "Right dude?!" America agreed excitedly.

"Oooh! Maybe we could have something like an art gallery showing for interesting artists in out countries or things we make ourselves." France offered.

A few murmurs from other countries were heard through the room.

"I like America's idea, it would be better for us to relax and be being friends, yes?" Russia added, sending Alfred an encouraging smile.

"I think America's point is a good one, we tend to not get a lot done due to bravado and fighting getting in the way. Relaxing and focusing more on cultural exchange could be very beneficial." Germany agreed.

"I like this plan. Stress has likely caused a lot of un-needed tension." Japan said thoughtfully.

Alfred was elated, the other countries were actually listening to him! They thought he had a good idea! He couldn't help himself though, his gaze flicked over to England, who was still being oddly silent. So, despite himself, he decided to engage him.

"What do you think about the idea old man?" He prodded.

"Ah… I think it's a good idea, I'm in favor." He said plainly, not even looking him in the eye.

He looked back at him stunned. What… what the hell was up with him? It felt weird. He didn't know what to think. Despite the fact England was agreeing with him, he was being… not cold exactly… just… weird. He couldn't tell if he was ignoring him… or mad at him… or something else.

What the hell?!

He made himself look away, and focus on the positive feedback from everyone else, only minor concerns raised here and there. He hated feeling sucky, so he wasn't going to look at the person making him feel sucky.

He kept a smile on his face despite the fact he didn't really feel like smiling for a moment there.

"Well heck, if everyone is in agreement, maybe we can all come up with ideas and figure out the logistics at tomorrow's meeting and through online communication throughout the month!" He proposed.

He was still encouraged by the fact his plan was being taken seriously, but he was relieved when he got to stop presenting as the meeting was adjourned. He glared at England's back as he rushed out of the room quickly without saying a word to anyone. He grumbled and leaned over to Matthew.

"What the hell is up with England? One of his fairies croak or something??" He asked with an eye roll.

Canada grimaced. "Uh… well… actually, um… I think he's being weird because he and I had a fight…"

Alfred froze and looked at his twin. "You and England fought?? YOU and England???"

He shock quickly turned to rage as he grabbed Mattie's shoulders. "He didn't seriously hurt your feelings did he?? I swear to god and heaven if he *hurt you forget any alliances I'll-!"*

"Woah Woah! Slow down Alfred, no, he didn't hurt me. Actually our fight was mostly me yelling at him…" Canada said, looking off to the side.

"*You* can *yell?*" Alfred asked in confusion.

Canada rolled his eyes.

"Well… why did you… I mean… what happened?" Alfred asked quizzically.

Canada sighed. "The other day, when you and Russia were off together doing heterosexual things I'm sure…"

"Of course."

"Of course." Mattie teased before continuing. "Well, when it was getting close to meeting time, he had just had an argument with France, and made an excuse that he was going to go find you two to make sure you wouldn't be late."

Alfred rolled his eyes, typical control freak England.

"Well, he already ruined a moment Italy and Germany were having outside the meeting room, so I knew he was in a particularly bad mood… and I didn't want him bugging you two when maybe you were having a good moment, so I went after him…"

Alfred stared at Matthew, his brother was really looking out for him like that…

"Aww Matt…" He said, furrowing his brows.

Matthew shook his head. “I stopped him, he was being snippy of course… then… gee, I don’t know… I got mad I guess.”

Canada being *mad*, *yelling?* He honestly would have paid good money to have a recording of that.

“I told him that I was sick of *both* of us always getting caught in the middle of him and France fighting… how much they *both* used us, but *especially* England during their war back then when…”

Alfred bit his lip. “When we needed them to be there for us instead…” He finished quietly.

Matthew nodded. “And I told England to figure his own crap out and stop taking it out on everyone else, and that he has no right to complain that you aren’t around anymore when all he does is berate you and push you away.”

Alfred scratched his head. “Geeze…”

“When I guess I got it all out, he just sort of… looked at me stunned… and didn’t say anything… he just sort of went back to the meeting room and sat down.” Canada said.

“Holy shit dude. Sounds like you completely wrecked him.” Alfred responded, genuinely not sure what to think.

In some way, the stupid part of him still kind of hoped that… England would turn a new leaf, figure shit out with France, and maybe he could have that a parental figure again, but… there was a lot of damage to be repaired. Damage that wasn’t *his* responsibility anymore. He had spent way too much time as a kid and teen waiting for England to come back, or be done fighting with France, or approve of him… say something as simple as “I’m proud of you”, or just “I’m not ashamed of you and I don’t think you’re a dumb piece of shit that sucks and should be hated”. Even if England had never said something *that* harsh specifically, he still felt it.

“I guess so…” Canada furrowed his brows. “Maybe I went too far… and I should apologize…”

Alfred grabbed his shoulders. “Don’t you dare. You’re a kindhearted guy Mattie, maybe to a fault, but that also means you wouldn’t have snapped if you didn’t have a damn good reason. If he’s like this right now ‘cause of you, we should hope that’s because he’s doing some thinking and stuff… if you apologize, that would just give him an out to *not* think about it. Cause … I don’t know, I guess I get it, sometimes its easier to pretend it’s everyone else and not *you*, sometimes like, you want to control things instead of have to deal with complicated times and emotions… but that doesn’t make it okay, not when someone else gets hurt.”

Mattie sighed and hung his head before smiling a little again. “I guess I do say sorry too much.”

“Yeah… very Canadian of you.” Alfred teased.

“Yeah… yeah, I know.” He laughed.

He then felt Ivan’s large hand on his shoulder. “Is everything alright sunflower?”

Mattie raised his eyebrows at Alfred as Alfred turned bright pink at the cute nickname. *Sunflower*… well shit, Ivan already had a head start on the nickname game.

“Nah, it’s all good now.” He reassured.

Canada immediately smiled. “I’m very happy for you two! Congratulations!”

Ivan beamed cheerfully. “Thank you very much Canadia! I appreciate your approval!”

“heheh… yeah thanks Mattie.” Alfred said, feeling very bashful all the sudden, as if his brother congratulating them solidified the realness of it all… and it was… nice, really nice.

“I’ll let you two go for now, but come over for pancakes sometime, okay?” He offered with a wave as he started to head off.

“You bet! See ya bro!” Alfred waved.

Once it was just him and Ivan again Alfred let out a sigh.

“You are certain you are alright?” Ivan asked again.

Alfred leaned back against him. “Yeah… just bugged about England and annoyed at myself for being bugged about England. Like I shouldn’t care, ya know?”

Ivan hummed and Alfred suddenly felt 10 times more relaxed as his head was pet slightly, it was a sweet little gesture that was for sure.

“You should not reprimand yourself for being bothered, such feelings are normal with complicated familial relationship.” Ivan suggested softly.

“Yeah… I just… I guess I don’t want to be a downer, and I’d rather not have to feel bad if I can avoid it.” He admitted.

“You do not have to be happy all time, you realize this, yes? I’d be more worried if you were perpetually happy.” Ivan said with a worried look.

Alfred stared up at him with wide eyes. “You… wouldn’t like me less if I wasn’t super cheery all the time?”

“Of course not, this would be silly reason to dislike someone since it is normal, yes?”

Alfred grumbled to himself. “You… gah, you just keep making me like you more and more!”

Ivan beamed. “Oh! I do? This was not intention, but this makes me very happy to hear!”

He was so cute, he was so god fucking c u t e god DAMMIT.

Italy had been greatly looking forward to the weekend, because now he was arriving at Germany's house, and they could start having fun together. When he knocked on the door happily, he nearly started giggling because he could hear Germany come running down the stairs and skip a few steps, only to pause at the door. Italy figured he must have been trying to not look as excited as he was.

His theory was only confirmed when Germany opened the door, and leaned against the wall ""casually"".

"Ah, Italy, there you are, come in." He said, seemingly struggling to keep his face nutural.

Italy smiled at him cheerfully. This silly man, he was too cute for words. It was nice to know him coming over made his Germany so happy!

As always Germany's house was perfectly clean and in order, but there was a soft sweet smell that hung in the air from his baking that was always so welcome. As they walked in, he put a hand on the middle of Germany's back to get his attention and give a hello kiss, so happy he could now do so. Germany was still so shy as he lightly kissed back, but it was okay. Feliciano didn't mind at all, he was Italy! He could drive the romantic bus at a good pace.

The way Ludwig seemed both hesitant and curious, lightly putting his hands on his shoulders… leaning in, but stiffening up at the same time, Feliciano could tell he wasn't used to being physically affectionate with someone, but really wanted to have that at the same time. It had to be such a confusing mix of excitement and nervousness.

He nearly melted as they parted and Ludwig gave him a wide-eyed stare with furrowed brows, almost something like a *puppy dog* kind of look as if to ask "*did I do okay?"*. Ludwig was such a tall strong guy, but then he would make such cute expressions like *that*. He loved it.

He gave Germany's nose an extra little kiss to silently tell him he absolutely did good.

Once Germany relaxed he visibly lit up. "So, are you ready to see it?" He asked.

Feli grinned, he had barely been containing his excitement at the idea of Ludwig showing something off he was so happy and excited about, and he had to admit, if the sports cars didn't give it away, he was a bit of a sucker for nice vehicles and bikes himself. And Germany… *his* Germany on a motorcycle like that? In *leather???* It sent shivers up his spine. So yes. He was more than ready to see it, and very very excited.

"Si! Si! Show me!" He said, bouncing up and down a little.

Ludwig was about to lead him back towards the garage before he paused. "Wait, I have a better idea."

He suddenly took Feli's hand and led him back outside, Italy smiled and giggled as he was carefully positioned on the side walk, facing away from the garage door and facing the street.

“hehe! Do you want to show off for me Germany?” He asked teasingly.

“…Maybe just a little.” Ludwig answered bashfully. “Now don’t peek, just wait for me to come out in front of you.”

“Si Si, no peeking! I promise!” Italy agreed, rocking back and forth on his feet as Ludwig rushed inside.

He waited patiently and sang to himself as the garage door opened behind him, he then had his breath catch in his throat as he could hear the motorcycle roar to life. He was full on swooning as Germany came rushing out and did a few excited circles on the road in front of him to show off his control of the bike while grinning at Feli before coming to a stop.

“What do you think?” He asked, and Feli thought he might faint at the confidence flowing off him.

“You look amazing…er! OH! I MEAN the bike! The bike looks amazing….”

Ludwig blushed and smiled a little cheekily. “Thank you.”

Feli fanned his face a little, feeling his face grow hot. Ahhh screw it, this was his boyfriend now, he could say what he thought.

“You look more sexy on it than I ever even imagined!” He said with blunt honesty, letting his eyes roam wherever they pleased.

“HHhh! You… er… were imagining it?” Ludwig stammered. “You really think I..? I mean??”

He laughed. “Of course! I thought I was going to pass out and meet my maker when you came out you looked so good! Just the outfit you wear for it alone drives me wild.” He said confidently.

Ludwig ran a hand through his hair, trying to look away to hide both his bright red face and his little smile before calming down enough to look up at Feliciano with a look that Feli almost thought was downright *seductive*.

“Do you want to go for a ride?” He asked.

Did his voice drop? It seemed… smoother all of the sudden.

Feli certainly didn’t need to be asked twice.

He felt lighter than air as he hugged onto Germany’s waist tightly, laughing happily as the wind rushed through their hair*. Germany was so warm, and he could see and *feel* the other man’s joy grow as they sped faster and faster.

Not the rumble of the engine, nor the adrenaline from going so fast in the wide open air could compare to the exhilaration he felt at seeing Ludwig so happy.

Chapter End Notes

*Don't drive a motorcycle without a helmet lol

Also, I don't know if it would actually make sense in canon to replace the world meetings, but I just... want my faves to be happy and have fun lol. And this fic is pretty self indulgent already, so may as well.

Normal

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It had been about one and a half months since Alfred and his favorite Russian had been ‘official’, and he was still beyond cloud 9 over it.

Though there was one hilarious thread that had been wrapped up.

“Damn, you were so jealous you were going to try and square up to me and stare me down huh?” Alfred had been grinning ear to ear when he had gotten to patch things up with Italy.

“…Si… It was dumb I know, normally I wouldn’t! You know me, I just thought… and Germany, I mean, I always thought maybe he wouldn’t like me because I was too *weak* if he even liked guys at all so…” Feli had been hanging his head guiltily.

Alfred pat him on the back, making extra sure he wouldn’t accidently hurt him, which, almost made him laugh because that it proved further that poor Italy would never stand a chance no matter how brave he got.

“It’s all good dude, I am a snack and a half, so can’t blame you for thinking I might steal your guy away, but no worries, he’s too much of a bro, ya kno bro?”

Italy stared at him for a moment before nodding vigorously. “Yes, I …yes…”

“Well now we’re buddies again, I was thinking, we like, got set up with our ideal baes on the same day, we should *totally* do some double dates!”

Italy’s nervousness had washed away immediately. “Yeah! That could be really fun! That’s a great idea America!!”

So, it had been agreed upon, and now Alfred was prepping to go out on his tenth date with Ivan, and his first double date! Happy with the purple flannel shirt he had open over a black T-shirt, he went to the bathroom where Ivan was brushing his teeth and hugged him from behind. He stood on his toes so he could kiss the back of Ivan’s neck by his right ear, which he had to take every opportunity to get to since he wore that scarf all the time. He had asked about the bandages and scars around the middle of his neck before, but Ivan had gotten quiet before expressing he wasn’t quite ready to talk about that yet, but he would.

Alfred had accepted his answer quickly, there were some things he wasn’t ready to talk about either. And he knew Ivan’s history was… long… and treacherous. One thing he had mentioned is he had the experience of freezing to death without actually *dying* due to being a country several times as a child. He couldn’t imagine how traumatic that feeling would be when you’re so young and being attacked from all sides.

After that he had started cuddling Ivan even more, half feeling like, in a silly way that he wanted to make sure his boo was never cold again.

“Ghh.. you’re so *big and tall* it’s so unfair!” He complained, fake pouting a little bit.

Ivan rinsed out his mouth and hummed. “Unfair? You did not seem to think so the past several nights little one.” He responded coyly.

Alfred turned red and buried his face in Ivan’s back. “You know I wasn’t meaning..! Damn, I walked right into that.”

“Yes, Yes you did.” Ivan said with a delighted chuckle before picking up his scarf and wrapping it around his neck again.

Alfred loosened his grip and Ivan turned, and he suddenly found an arm around his waist and he *actually* let out an embarrassing sheepish yelp as he was lifted up with one arm onto the sink counter where Ivan promptly gave him a full on proper kiss.

This guy was too much, really. But he was already pawing at Ivan’s chest and leaning up eagerly so… ya win some ya loose some. When they parted Alfred hopped down but took Ivan’s hand as they gathered the last few things they needed before heading out.

“You are very clingy… this is not complaint in slightest!” Ivan said, as if predicting that Alfred would start worrying over the first part of his statement and squeezed his hand a little tighter.

Alfred stuck out his tongue playfully before bopping his head against Ivan’s arm teasingly. “You’re nice to cling to!”

“It is nice having warm person I like by my side so often!” Ivan said happily as they headed out the door.

Yep, it was confirmed, they had to be the cutest couple. Alfred totally wasn’t considering making a trophy for both of them to commemorate it.

Ludwig almost thought it was funny looking back at how pissed he used to get when Feliciano would leap in the shower with him, because now it seemed they did everything together, and it felt… natural. Italy had also developed a habit of hugging and putting his hand up his shirt and feeling the muscles underneath that Ludwig was very proud of thank you very much whenever he could. Sometimes he’d just chatter on while hugging him like that from behind and gripping onto to his chest, it sort of made Ludwig feel like he was wrapped in some sort of comforting Italian wrap.

He hadn’t let himself be open to touch in past, but Italy was very touchy-feely, and he was growing more and more happy that was the case. And Ludwig was slowly realizing he might have been a closeted cuddler this whole time.

Well… actually he realized he had been closeted in a lot of ways.

When he and Feli had first *slept* together a few weeks ago, while coming down from the after-glow he had covered his face with his hands and uttered the words:

"*Oh my god I'm gay aren't I???"*

To which Feli had sat up and given him the oddest look. "LuLu, not to judge or anything, but ah… you're just now realizing that patatino? Though I guess you could have been bi or pan or something…" He said thoughtfully.

He felt a little silly. Actually a lot silly.

He had done all that thinking, had known he was never even able to successfully fake an interest in women, gotten together with Italy, gone through all the careful prep and research before their first time, and he was just now coming to the conclusion he was gay.

As if sensing his distress Italy had stroked his hair gently. "It's okay Lu, I didn't come to terms with the fact I liked men at all for a long time either, and the catholic guilt? Terrible! I was so scared I'd go straight to hell!!"

That had gotten Ludwig to pull him down into a hug before managing to ooze up out of bed so he could go wash up, with his Italian in tow.

Since then, him being well… *him* had decided to do some research to fully affirm what he supposed he'd now take on as part of his identity. Like some of the other changes he had been making in his lifestyle lately, it had been… scary, but also liberating.

Now, he was getting ready with Feli to go on their first double date. It'd be nice to chat with Alfred again, especially now that they both found Italy and Russia's jealousy over their perceived 'relationship' rather comical.

"Germanyyyyy I can't decide! Blue?? Or maybe yellow..? Or black? Would black be too morbid?" Italy cried, having trouble picking out what shirt he wanted to wear as usual, which Germany was beginning to think was why he was late to things.

Though… all three colors looked really good on him, so he was a bit stumped too.

"Hmm, the blue maybe?" He suggested after thinking for a minute. "We're going to be outside, and the blue one is thinner right? The temperature is supposed to be pretty warm today…"

"Hehe! That's my practical smart Germany!" Italy praised, which caused Ludwig to smile to himself happily as he finished shaving.

When he was done and came out, Italy had just finished carefully rolling up his sleeves. He smiled and looked his boyfriend up and down. "Ja, the blue looks good."

"Thank you cucciolo!" He chirped.

Feli then came up to him and gently put his hands on his waist before kissing all over his freshly shaven and smooth, clean face.

“You look handsome as always Luddy.”

Ludwig cupped his cheeks and softly kissed him back. “Danke, Liebling.” He responded affectionately.

“Now hurry up and get your wallet and keys or we’ll be late.” He teased.

“Aye Aye Captain!”

Ivan watched as they successfully met up with the other couple and Alfred bounced and hugged his German friend. It was sort of amusing, now he knew they were not a couple, they were sort of like two types of dogs greeting each other… a golden retriever and German shepherd maybe…

He happily greeted his new Italian friend in the meantime.

“Привет Italy!”

“Ciao, Ciao, Russia! How have things been going between you and America?” He asked already waving his hands excitedly.

He noticed both Alfred and Feliciano seemed to move their hands around a lot when feeling intense emotions such as excitement.

“We are doing good, yes? Alfred is like koala!” He said honestly and happily.

“I’m so happy to hear that! LuLu has gotten pretty cuddly too!”

He then turned as he caught the end of Germany and America’s conversation.

“We still on for that race now you're used to driving that motorcycle?”

“Of course, I hope you’re ready for defeat Alfred.” Ludwig said cockilly crossing his arms. “I suppose I can go easy on you…” He teased.

“Pfft, don’t even *think* about holding back, cause you’re going *down* dude!” Alfred said with a laugh.

A race? How fun!

“Wah! Germany you and America are going to race like that? That sounds dangerous! Will you be okay? I mean racing is really fun and everything, me and my fratello have done it but..!”

Oh that too.

“Don’t worry Italy, we’re both good drivers, it’s all in good fun.” Germany soothed, which seemed to pacify Feliciano’s worries immdiatly.

“Danger is my middle name!” Alfred quipped.

“I thought it was ‘Fredrick’ or something” Ivan said absentmindedly.

“Fred… Alfred Fredrick Jones, hell no dude.” Alfred said, wrinkling his nose.

“What *does* the ‘F’ stand for then?” Germany asked with a raised eyebrow. “I thought it might be “Fitzgereld” that was JFK’s middle name, right?”

“Nope, that ain’t it either! Er… I mean it was Kennedy’s middle name but it’s not mine.” Alfred countered.

“Hmm… Is it Franklin? Or Fettuccine?” Italy guessed, tapping his chin thoughtfully.

“Nope! It *totally* stands for Freedom!” America cheered.

Russia nearly laughed when both Italy and Germany rolled their eyes out of amusement in unison.

“That cannot be your real name.” Germany said with a shake of his head.

“Too bad, so sad, Freedom always has, and always will be my middle name!” Alfred cheered.

“...I suppose I’ll take your word for it.” Ludwig conceded as they took their seats at the nice restaurant outdoors in Feliciano’s country they had agreed on.

The smell in the air was warm and welcoming, and vines decorated the walls, leaves moving softly in the late afternoon breeze.

Italy was definitely another warm country, but Ivan was still firm about wearing his scarf given to him by his sister and a long-sleeved sweater, having less layers on still felt… unnatural.

Even when he and Alfred were in bed together he still felt a bit weird having his body exposed… and he wasn’t sure why. It wasn’t as if he’d freeze to death inside with his sunflower, but something in him still…

He unconsciously put his hand on Alfred’s knee under the table as if doing so would make it so he wouldn’t remember something so terrible, and immediately Alfred quietly rubbed his arm before moving down to hold Ivan’s hand in his lap, and he immediately felt at ease.

Alfred’s middle name mystery did now have him curious, he’d have to double check if “Freedom” really was what it stood for later.

The double date got more fun in Italy’s opinion when the alcohol joined the mix, Ludwig was always a bit giggly and cheery when tipsy, Alfred seemed more relaxed… the only one unaffected seemed to be Russia, but then again, Feli had heard something at some point that in the USSR vodka produced by state-owned brands used to come in half-liter bottles that

couldn't be recapped once opened because they just expected Russians to finish the full thing quickly… maybe he had a high tolerance.

They had all started talking about cars at some point, and Italy was more than happy to gush with America over Ferraris and Alfred was super excited to tell him about a chrome Lamborghini he had lost his mind over about he saw it somewhere in San Francisco.

Ludwig and Ivan got into a friendly debate over what baked goods were the best and if soft or crunchy cookies were better… which the table eventually ended up getting to vote in. Unfortunately it was inconclusive, Ivan and Alfred seemed to settle on crunchy, while he and Ludwig were in the soft camp. Personally, Feli couldn't imagine preferring crispy cookies over nice soft warm cookies, but to each their own he supposed.

Their evening out was… nice… Italy leaned on Ludwig's shoulder after they had all finished eating and continued chatting as the sun went down. In all the centuries he had been alive, he'd never felt this close to… normal. Like all the long history and responsibilities around being a personification had melted away, and they could just be… *them*.

"Alfred have your ears always been pierced?" Ludwig asked suddenly and curiously.

Oh yeah, America was wearing stud earrings wasn't he? He had only vaguely noticed.

"Huh? Oh yeah, I've had them pierced since the 80's, though for a while it was only the gay ear I had pierced."

"The… gay ear? How can an ear alone have a sexuality?" Ivan asked curiously and Italy nearly spit out his wine as he laughed.

"Why is it called such a thing… and which one is it?" Ludwig asked curiously.

"Oh! So there was a point where if you wanted to quietly signal you were gay, you'd wear an piece of jewelry just on your right ear." Alfred explained.

Ludwig leaned forward on the table thoughtfully. "I kind of want one… a piercing I mean… or two… my brother has something like six now, though I don't think I'd go that far…"

Alfred perked up and flailed his arms excitedly and a bit drunkenly. "Duuuuuuuuuuuude! You should go for it!"

Italy found himself perking up as well as he imagined his boyfriend with such an accessory. "I think you'd look really good with them LuLu!" He then gasped. "Ooh! Then I'd have a new thing that I could get you for presents!"

Ludwig blushed. "Dammit Feli, why are you so sweet? You're going to make my teeth rot out." His words were starting to be progressively more slurred together, which just made his Germany's response all the more adorable.

"You're the sweet one LuLu! Everything about you is sweet!"

“Feliiiiiiieeeeeeeeeee Nooooo you!” Ludwig responded, obviously touched, but Italy had to giggle as he could tell he was definitely drifting into being less cognizant.

Ivan was smiling calmly at Alfred who was already holding onto his arm and rambling about something related to a movie he had seen recently, he then turned to Italy and raised his eyebrows.

“I think it is about time we get our respective partners home, yes?” Ivan suggested.

Italy had to agree as he pet Germany’s head soothingly. “Si, I think so…”

“I’m fiiiinnnne dude.” Alfred slurred slightly before breaking out into a laugh.

“We have ice cream at home, little one, we just have to go there to get it!” Ivan bribed, which immediately made Alfred’s head snap to him and eyes light up. The bribe had worked successfully.

Italy turned to Germany who he realized had been staring at him affectionately and adoringly while he had been talking to Russia in a way that made his heart soar.

He smiled softly. “Are you ready to go LuLu?” He asked.

Ludwig nodded. “Ja, I’m happy to go with you.” He conceded much quicker than Alfred had.

They all stood up, together. Alfred rounded the table and fell into a friendly hug with Germany to say goodbye.

“This was fun dudes!” He said as he pulled away, trying to pretend to be fine even as he stumbled back and was caught from falling over by Ivan. “We gotta… we gotta do it again.”

Italy nodded. “Si! It was nice to be out like normal couples!”

“Yes… normalcy… it was very nice…” Ivan slowly agreed.

“Ja, I feel…” Germany smacked his own chest a little and Italy delicately adjusted Ludwig’s stance so he wasn’t leaning so heavily to the left. “Like a person!”

Italy was glad to see they had all shared the same sentiment, and he was more than happy to take his blushy and currently clumsy German home.

When they got there, he more than happily escorted Germany up to bed as he was starting to go from drunk to sleepy, humming cheerfully as he felt he could make good on his promise from ages ago that if Germany ever needed it, he’d be there for him.

So he carefully took off his shoes and helped him get cozy and bed-ready, at one point he started singing a soothing song in his own language absentmindedly, wondering, as he looked at Ludwig… how he had gotten so lucky.

He was about to move to get bed-ready himself when suddenly his arm was grabbed and he was pulled full force on top of his German. He laughed as Ludwig hugged his waist and

looked up at him with those wide blue eyes he adored so much.

"...I love you…" Ludwig uttered… so softly and sincerely it made Feli audibly gasp as his heart fluttered. Even if he was drunk… he knew those words were raw and true… coming straight from his heart.

He looked down at his sweetheart and kissed him, overflowing with happiness.

"I love you too tesoro."

Alfred was on top of the world, no… *king* of the world … as he was carried full on bridal style by Ivan after having stumbled one too many times. Jokes on him, he had *toooootally* just been faking so he could get carried.

Feeling daring, he grinned and began attacking Ivan's jaw with kisses as the front door was closed, more than pleased with himself when Russia made a grunting noise as Alfred decided to suck on his neck, just behind his right ear, definitely leaving a hickey behind.

"You are very eager in your 'attacks' aren't you Fredya?" Ivan commented.

"You know it big guy." Alfred smirked back slightly.

God damn this man managed to look so soft and so strong at the same time, so handsome and cute, hardened but kind… he was an enigma, a contradiction, his Ivan.

"You're hot." He said stupidly after his staring.

"And you are drunk. Adorable… but drunk, little one."

Alfred groaned. "Can you blame me? I can't drink alcohol in my own country just cause I *look* nineteen or whatever, but you know I totally think I'm lookin' a solid 20 these days, that's close enough to 21 right? And like I'm 413 years old now! Ughhhh." He complained. "Hey, how old are you now anyway?" Alfred suddenly asked curiously.

Ivan chuckled as he carried Alfred upstairs. "You know it is rude to ask someone's age, yes?"

Alfred puffed out his cheeks. "Come onnnn dude! I wanna know!"

"Hmm… you tell me truthfully if your middle name is really "freedom" and I'll tell you how old I am, how about that?" Ivan suggested.

Alfred paused, clicking his tongue a little. "…You know I probably could google it and figure it out right?"

"Probably, yes." Ivan agreed, setting Alfred down on the bed.

Alfred grumbled. But he did *still* really want to hear it from Russia himself…

"Okay *fine*." He pouted before shuffling his feet and kicking off his shoes. "My middle name actually stands for um… *Forrest**."

He looked up meekly as Ivan tilted his head. "What is so wrong about this name that you feel need to hide it? I was thinking it would be something silly like… 'Fiddle' with your reaction."

Alfred sighed, scratching his head. "I don't… I don't like saying what it is cause… it's the human name *England* gave me. It's not even that clever, its just cause it's a British name and he found me near a forest or whatever… That was my human name for the longest time 'Forrest Kirkland'…" He huffed, cringing at the old name. "Pretty lame and not me at all, huh?"

"Ahhh… I see." Ivan sat down next to him. "You could permanently change your name if you wanted, have middle name actually be "freedom" if you wanted."

Alfred huffed out a laugh. Ivan really was a good guy… a *really* good guy, he couldn't believe he had ever called him a villain.

"Yeah… I know… I'm not totally sure why I'm hanging onto it. I mean, I like how "Alfred F. Jones" sounds… though having F. stand for Freedom might be too much even for me." He joked. "And… I don't know… it's um, kind of like the stuff I keep in my storage shed, every time I try to go through it and get rid of stuff, I just *can't*. It's… stupid…"

He felt himself melting just from Russia putting his arms around his shoulders.

"This is not stupidity at work." Ivan said bluntly, and for some reason that statement alone already made him feel better. "Take this with a salt grain, but could it be you are still feeling… attached to England in some way?"

Alfred grimaced but thought about it, leaning slowly and sadly into Ivan's shoulder.

"…so much of my childhood was spent waiting for him." He slowly admitted. "And… sometimes I feel like no matter how much I don't want to, I'm *still* waiting for him."

He took initiative with what he felt he needed and climbed into Russia's lap so he could snuggle into his chest for comfort. "I know it's selfish cause like… many of the countries *barely* got a parental figure if any at all, I had lots of people that found me and acted like a parent for me even if their bosses and people weren't always being great, Spain… France… Prussia even… If England ever had a parental figure, he's never talked about it… but…" Alfred trailed off, unsure what to say next.

"It is natural to want comfort, especially as a young country. It is scary, and it is *lonely*. The harshness of death and reality hits hard. Intentional or not, England took on role of guardian for you but was not able to provide comfort you needed, yes?" Ivan offered

Alfred nodded. "Yeah…"

“But he gave you enough comfort that it leaves you wondering where it has gone when it wasn’t there, yes?”

“Y-Yeah! That’s exactly it.” He said looking into Ivan’s eyes, realizing he had gotten a little teary eyed.

He sighed as Ivan lightly brushed a tear away from his eye and held his face tenderly. “It is okay to feel upset, it is okay to feel confused…” Ivan thought for a moment. “When I think of my sisters, I get very depressed, we used to only have each other, but everything was still so hard, and now I can’t see one of them, and the other… is… ah… well I think life treated her even harder than it did me, so she seeks comfort and security in strange ways. It is not same situation… but I understand complicated feelings and confusion around family that is inevitably complicated and hard with all of us. You are not alone or wrong for feeling such ways.”

Alfred listened carefully. He couldn’t imagine if he was unable to see Mattie, or if Mattie had turned out anything like Belarus… his bosses had already made it hard with Mexico no matter how much he had complained and gotten headaches over it, it had been ages since he had been able to hang out with Alejandro just normally without a lot of crap out of their control hanging in the air. He bit his lip and thought about Italy and Romano loosing Rome, who had to be the only comfort they had known before being left on their own and kicked around by other countries, or Ludwig who had gotten more and more protective and worried over his brother and the fact it was more than likely Gilbert would fade away sooner rather than later…

The nature of being countries, this certain but not guaranteed immortality, the fact they had childhoods, both brief and long, that had them going through horrific things when their minds were still innocent and unaware…

It was cruel. To all of them.

Ivan’s history… had been especially cruel to him. The hero in Alfred wished he could build a time machine, go back in time, and stop every single bad thing that had ever happened.

And maybe he wanted to go back and tell England to love that kid he had taken in all he could before it was too late, tell him he was going to grow up so much faster than he thought, and not to take that kid’s adoration of him for granted… because it wouldn’t last… and for fucks sake to put his conflict with France aside for *two* seconds and stop *using* him to fuel it.

“Hey Ivan?” He finally said as he came out of his thoughts.

“Yes Lyubimiy?” He said, seemingly having been content just holding Alfred against him.

“…I love you… like… a lot… thank you for listening.”

Ivan’s gaze softened dramatically, and Alfred swooned at the tender look he got. “I love you too sunflower… thank you for loving me.”

Alfred slowly smiled again and nuzzled his nose against Ivan’s before kissing it.

“Soo… I told you my middle name, so how old are you?”

Ivan hummed. “Ah yes, that was deal… I think somewhere around the 1,100 year mark… give or take a few decades. I lost exact count around 1,000 years.”

“You old geezer.” Alfred teased.

“Still several thousand years younger than china!” Ivan replied happily. “And I believe Italy is older since he was around before Rome fell.”

Alfred chuckled. “I guess you got me there… time with us is weird.”

“Yes.”

Alfred then winked. “Well ,I must say you don’t look a day over 500.”

Ivan chuckled along with him and they put their heads together, happy to have each other there… finally, after so much turmoil.

Chapter End Notes

*Since Alfred's middle name has never been confirmed, I took the oppertunity to acknowledge fanon while having some backstory fun!

Familly 2: Electric Boogaloo

Chapter Summary

Some things have to be said, and maybe the mending can begin.

Chapter Notes

Mostly an Alfred-centric chapter! Next one will likely be more Ludwig focused!

This chapter is a bit more of an bittersweet one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Most of the countries *knew* their bosses wouldn't be that happy with the perceived 'slacking off' that was happening.

Ivan had started acting particularly nervous and Alfred tried his best to soothe him, but… he seemed particularly scared of his government's wrath… not that Alfred could blame him, he certainly knew what having a hell-government that didn't listen to you and just hurt you felt like. A lot of them had. Actually… was there any country that didn't have a bad boss at some point that was nasty as hell?

"Hey, the rest of us are agreeing to do this, if he tries to take you out of it or gets on your case about it give me a call and I'll whoop his ass." He had tried to say as they were set to attend their first "world gathering" rather than world meeting.

"Wouldn't that violate treaties?"

"Like I give a shit, if he hurts you he's already violating a treaty in my mind, a treaty to not piss me the fuck off." Alfred insisted.

Ivan sighed and pet his head. "I admire your confidence and bravado little one."

Alfred leaned against him a little more. "Hey, for real though, I'm not going to let you get hurt. Don't let him intimidate you into being miserable, you're *Russia* for gods sake… … he's still a mortal ya know."

"…I'm not going to murder my boss sunflower."

"Just a thought, just a thought…" Alfred laughed.

“Have you thought about taking out your own boss before?” Ivan asked with amused raised eyebrows.

“… .. … .I plead the fifth.” He responded, sticking out his tongue.

When they got there the smell of multiple foods from different cultures mixed together and smelled a-ma-z-ing. It had been fun cooking with Ivan in preparation too! Even if Alfred making buffalo wings and Ivan making Solyanka (which Alfred had totally not struggled to say) were odd things to be cooking at the same time.

Alfred felt his excitement building at all the good food everyone was laying out, he caught Italy putting out what looked like tortellini, and of course Germany had made what looked like a crazy good cake.

“Yo! Dude what kind of cake is it?” Alfred asked, analyzing it excitedly.

“*Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte.”* Ludwig said proudly.

Alfred looked at him, eyes wide like a deer in headlights, Ludwig just chuckled.

“It means Black Forest Cherry-Torte, you don’t have to worry about calling it by its German name.”

Alfred sighed in relief. He probably could with practice, he was pretty good at picking up languages when he put effort into it, but still, that was a mouthful.

“I tried saying it about a billion times this morning and I couldn’t get it at all!” Italy admitted with a laugh. “My tongue doesn’t move like that!”

“Oh, Ivan, is that *Solyanka?* My brother loves it.” Ludwig asked curiously as he had begun surveying the table similarly to Alfred.

Ivan straightened up with a happy smile. “Oh? Really? That is nice to know! I used to serve it all the time when I was watching over him!”

“I believe it was the most popular dish in East Germany for quite some time. He still makes it sometimes. It’s very good.” Ludwig affirmed and praised, which only made Russia brighten up more.

Alfred rubbed Ivan’s shoulder encouragingly, and his gaze shifted as he noticed England calmly show up.

“*ignore him… just ignore him…”*

But despite that, Alfred felt like after this strange silent treatment phase and England not even looking at him he wanted… some sort of engagement. Was that healthy? Probably not…

“Hey Iggy! Did you bring your crusty old scones?” He teased with a grin.

For the first time in what felt like ages the old small man looked up at him, and sighed. “No, not this time, I’ve figured out I’m probably the only one who likes them at this point. So I just brought some biscuits… which I purchased at the store so I couldn’t mess them up, I thought about making fish and chips but last time I tried to fry something I got a nasty burn. It counts right? It’s still made in my country.” He rambled, setting said “biscuits” out. “Their probably best with tea as their pretty bland, but… I think there’s plenty of countries that brought tea, and I didn’t really come up with the idea of tea, even if its popular in my country… though I guess I didn’t come up with idea of biscuits either…” He scratched his cheek slightly.

England always rambled when he was nervous, and Alfred hated to admit he did the exact same thing.

France came up at pat his head, making England grimace. “You overthought this by a mile poor angleterre.”

Alfred thought Arthur might start a fight from getting defensive, but instead England just huffed and responded. “Probably.”

“You could have made Shepard’s Pie?” France suggested.

“…Dammit…” England grumbled. “I completely forgot! I tend to overcook the meat though…”

Alfred scratched his head in befuddlement. England had really been thinking a lot about this, huh?

France shook his head then turned his attention to America and sprinted forward, hugging him.

“Bonjour Amérique! What a wonderful idea this was!” Francis commented, causing Alfred to grin and hug him back.

“Thanks! I mean, what brings people together more than food?”

Francis gasped dramatically. “Oh! I couldn’t agree more! I’m so happy you think so too!” He praised once more. “Now where is your brother? I have to greet him too!”

Alfred hummed. “He sent me a text he was running a little late ‘cause he had to dig himself out of some snow, but he’ll probably be here any second!”

“Ah! Fantastic! I shall await his arrival.” France declared happily, already rushing off.

As France left, Alfred realized England was still looking at him, staring up with furrowed brows like he wanted to say something… but then he turned away, putting his hands in his pockets and wandering away to go talk to likely either Portugal or New Zealand.

God dammit England…

Alfred turned away slightly bitterly, whatever… he was hungry… he’d focus on that.

Like he always did.

Then, he heard a sigh, and a grunt, and suddenly his sleeve was tugged.

"…America… we should talk, if you have a moment… that is…" England had turned around and come back.

The idea of having a talk with England also didn't make him feel great even though he had just been pissed off at him leaving too. But…

"Yeah… okay, wanna step outside real quick?" He offered.

England nodded, lips pulled in a thin line.

Alfred pat Ivan on the arm. "I'll be right back, 'kay big guy?"

Ivan looked between him and Arthur before nodding. "да, alright Sunflower!"

England made no other comment as America followed him outside of the hall, stomach feeling a little sick and heart starting to pound nervously, palms feeling sweaty as his body pumped adrenaline into him, anxiety taking off in full force.

As soon as they were in semi-private, he looked down at England, trying his best to look unphased. England shuffled his feet, seemingly nervous himself.

"Look… I'm… not good at this sort of thing, but… I've been doing some thinking lately… and I suppose there are things I need to come out and say, no matter how strange and awkward it is…" He began, clearing his throat an unnecessary number of times. "I realize I haven't exactly been very fair with you and your brother, to put it lightly."

Alfred cocked his head to the side, feeling like he wanted to bite back something bitter and defensive, but decided against it.

"I've been trying to analyze why that is, there's plenty of things I regret, and I can see now that… that I believe I've hurt you, badly, but was so caught up in my own pity party I neglected to notice until I was slapped in the face with it…"

Alfred bit his lip. Wondering if this was even real.

"And I know now my ongoing *conflict* with France is something no one else should have *ever* been dragged into, especially when you were that young. Back then… I… I took everything for granted, power *absolutely* corrupted me. After feeling *small* and *weak* for ages, my own country feeling like it was eating itself alive, I suddenly had so many countries under me as per the will of my bosses and people… that's why we *can't* do empires anymore. It messes with your head. It hurts so many, and it *never* should have happened, and should never happen again." England shook his head. "But not being there for you, causing you to *hate* me, has always been one of my biggest regrets on a *personal* level, damn all the country bollocks…"

Alfred felt himself rendered speechless as he spoke, unsure of how to respond or what to think just yet, but as England stood there awkwardly… a burning question slipped out.

"Then… why do you always make me feel like I'm not *good* enough for you? Like you're *embarrassed* by me?"

England looked down at his hands that he was fiddling with. "I… didn't mean to… but I know intention only goes so far. I was… erm… trying to *parent* you… to try desperately to make up for what I didn't do in the first place, for not having been a great parental figure when you needed me to be, but I think I did the *wrong* kind of parenting… and I know it was too late anyway…"

America grumbled and pinched the bridge of his nose in exasperation.

"But I'm *not* embarrassed by you. I'm… overly paranoid about what others think about *me*, the restrictive values and having a *monarchy* in my home and having that so tied to *pride* did a number on me. Sometimes I still panic if I feel like I've *laughed* too loud, or… use the wrong fork… and I projected that, and did the same damn thing to you as was done to me by the people that put so much weight on this sort of social performance and stupid… *stupid* crap that doesn't matter all because I was *scared*... I was acting *cowardly*. It was never because I don't think you're enough."

England rubbed the back of his head and shifted his feet. "No… rather… I wish I were more like you. Because you bravely stuck up a middle finger to all that crap and boldly said you wouldn't take part. You do it to your own boss and refuse to not show everyone who you are. Your far *better* than I've ever been able to be. And I'm sorry… I'm sorry my ego is so bruised that I get defensive and try to control everything, I so often do it before I even know I'm doing it, I'm still trying to figure out what's wrong with me… why I get so angry, or flustered or why I have such difficulty talking to others. I-… I know I can't ever make up for the damage I've done but..!" His face was going red and he was shaking with nervousness.

"Woah Woah England… s-slow down for a sec. Like… breathe or something for a moment…" Alfred said, overwhelmed with the words being thrown at him and it looked like Arthur was about to explode from actually saying stuff like this for what had to be the first time in… ages.

Alfred ran his hands through his hair, digging his nails into his own scalp a little. England… didn't actually think he wasn't good enough? England *wished he was more... like him?*

"Well first of all… yeah… you hurt me. That stuff you said you admire, sometimes you've made me doubt it and like… think I'd be better if I was different." Alfred finally managed to say honestly. "It's so bad that you actually *supporting* something I've said kind of shocks me, not going to lie."

Arthur hung his head slightly, accepting Alfred's words as they came.

"But… its because of those times that you *did* try and I knew you gave a shit that it hurt so bad… 'cause… it was confusing to me. Like… …. You did bring me that flower I wanted to give to my friend, you remembered… but it was after Davie had already grown old and

died… and I learned about the mortality of humans through that and not through you… because you weren't there." He confessed.

"I… hadn't realized your friend was human when you asked me for it, I thought you might have meant Mexico when he was still under Spain or something. But…. I should have asked and not assumed I knew what was happening. If I had… I could have explained the nature of things to you… and maybe gotten the flower for you much faster." England admitted.

America sighed and leaned up against the wall. "Guess its in the past though…" He mumbled to himself.

"…It still hurts though. Your more than… what is it you say? "validated" in feeling such a way."

Alfred snorted. "Yeah… I guess."

Arthur followed Alfred's lead and leaned against the wall himself. "I apologize for rambling… I've had a lot on my mind the past few months."

"A lot needed to be said." Alfred countered.

"I feel like I still need to say a lot." He sighed. "Alfred… if you want to cut me out, completely… I'll understand. I told Matthew the same thing. A-And I mean it sincerely, not in some bullshit passive aggressive way."

Alfred peered at Arthur. "Do you *want* us to?"

"It doesn't really matter what *I* want." England countered.

"… but… do you want me around?" Alfred mumbled.

"…of course I do. I miss you, I worry about you. I just wish I had been a better parent and hadn't been so stubborn… then maybe I wouldn't have driven you away."

Alfred leaned his head back. This was… heavy shit to talk about. Did he really owe giving England another chance? Just 'cause they had been family?

No… he didn't.

But did he want to? Did he want England around now that he seemed to be trying?

He grumbled for what felt like the millionth time in the past 10 minutes and turned, trying to trust he wouldn't regret this, giving England a sort of… 'hug of calling a truce.' Catching the brit off guard.

"I'm not going to act like I forgive you for everything, and I think there's a lot of work to do… But I know how hard sayin' all that was for a stubborn mule like you, and you did it for me… so…"

He felt England slowly un-stiffen and pat America on the back in an awkward “there there” sort of way that made Alfred inwardly laugh.

He stood back and stuffed his hands back in his pockets. “Besides, if I totally wanted you gone, I wouldn’t have been still buggin’ or teasin’ you would I?” He said with a grin.

England rolled his eyes but calmly smiled back. “I hope I can earn that sentiment.”

“Hey, Iggy… have you ever thought about talking to a professional about some of this stuff too?” Alfred asked sincerely.

England raised his eyebrows before scratching his cheek and turning away. “I don’t know…”

“Look, there’s no shame in it, ‘kay? I go to one. It helps, a lot. Sometimes I get pissed off or… I remember something bad and it makes me want to lash out, but… they give you ways to manage it. Just cause some out of touch people wanna make you feel ashamed of asking for help, it doesn’t mean you shouldn’t still get it.”

England studied his face and bit his lip, seemingly giving it some thought.

“Frankly after all the shit we’ve all been through, probably every single country could benefit from talking to someone.” Alfred followed up with.

England tilted his head back and forth and grimaced as if to say ‘for real though’ except… more British. However you would say that in ‘””british”’.

“I’ll… give it a try. Thank you.” Arthur said with a nod and a sigh. “Your style of advice seems to have been doing wonders for Germany… I don’t think I could have ever imagined him so relaxed.” He noted.

Alfred shifted his feet bashfully. “Aw… well… I don’t know…”

“No, Alfred… you’ve done a lot of good for a lot of people, that’s praise worthy.”

Alfred turned red, not used to getting praise from England… but he did appreciate it. Silenced bloomed between them, but for once it wasn’t awkward.

“…by the by… you and Russia… are you??” Arthur asked suddenly, raising his large eyebrows and tilting his head curiously.

“Dating? Yeah. For a few months now.” Alfred said with a chuckle. “You’ve been dying to ask me that, haven’t you?”

Arthur smiled back sheepishly. “Well… a bit… yes….”

This got Alfred to break out into a full laugh. “You really are a gossip, aren’t you?”

“…*Maybe*.” Arthur admitted.

It was nice… it broke the tension in the air.

“Good for you both, you seem happy.” Arthur said after a minute.

“Yeah… I am, and I think Ivan is too.” Alfred replied.

“Well, lets not dawdle anymore, I’d hate for most of the food to be gone by the time we got back.” Arthur commented.

Alfred grinned, feeling like finally… maybe some progress could be made. “Yeah… bet you can’t handle the buffalo wings I made.”

“Are they spicy?” Arthur asked.

“*Are they spicy*, hell yeah they are dude!”

“Well, I look forward to my insides being annihilated then. …. …. Alright so they *are* made out of little chicken wings not… not buffalo.”

“Ye…Yeah.. uh…” Alfred stared at him in amusement as they walked in. “…Buffalos don’t have wings last time I checked.”

Arthur turned red. “Right right I knew that, of course, I was just… joking… I didn’t think Buffalo wings had buffalo in them…”

Alfred began cackling. “Suuuuuuuuuuuuure you did.”

Ivan had been anxious waiting for Alfred to come back, and was more than relieved to see talking with England had him coming back looking excited and laughing rather than down and upset.

This was good… perhaps he wouldn’t bash England’s head in *yet*.

He had been enjoying speaking with Germany, who had started talking a lot about his brother… it was a pity Gilbert wasn’t there with him, he wondered why, he should technically be invited, correct? Especially since this was a gathering. How odd.

However he was flattered that Gilbert seemed to have enjoyed something to the degree he apparently did.

Alfred came back and immediately hugged his side like the cuddly shchenok he was! How lucky he was to have such a person like him. How happy it made him!

So happy it terrified him to loose it.

But today was happy day, so he would enjoy it. Countries that normally didn’t talk to him were complimenting him on his food, and he in return found himself praising foods he never would have tried before!

He watched as Alfred seemed to glow brighter and brighter with every little compliment on his wings as well as praise for having the idea in the first place.

He smiled calmly. He once would have called his man his enemy… and now he was his lover, and here he was trying his best to make all their lives a little better despite everything.

A seed of dread was planted in his stomach, his boss wasn't happy with this sort of thing… What if… what if he got banned from seeing America… like his own sister had been banned from seeing him?

What if Alfred got hurt… because of him?

He didn't want to think that way! To feel that way at all!

But how many times had his happiness been ripped from him? Had he been happy and enjoying life only to have the things and people he loved destroyed? Only to be *punished*?

He couldn't let that happen… he couldn't *handle* it happening again even.

For the time being he just put his arm around his sunflower, holding him to his side tightly, sighing both happily and mournfully when the gesture was returned… he never wanted to let go. *Ever*.

Chapter End Notes

Finally wrapped up some of the underlying FACE fam. drama :P

Also, the most recent ep. of Hetalia gave me major Ivan feels so... folding that in here a bit lol.

I'm pretty much going to keep going with this fic until I've wrapped up all the loose ends and done all of the self-indulgent fluff I can muster!

Dramatalia

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The gathering idea seemed to be going off without a hitch. Ludwig knew at a certain point he may have thought something like food was… frivolous… partially because of his own shame around the things he enjoyed.

It seemed like there just wasn't… *time*, before, or maybe the world just wasn't as open to it.

"It smells so *good* in here! And everything tastes so good! Everyone did so well!" Italy commented happily.

"I have to agree with you on that… I'm also glad I put together the right number of tables for the spread to be successful, I was worried it might not be enough…" He mumbled thoughtfully.

Feliciano rubbed his back. He still wasn't quite over how… nice it was being able to have such quiet shows of affection come from Italy like this.

"Si! It was so sweet of you to figure that out! It's laid out so there's exactly enough room for everyone! You're so smart Lulu!" Italy encouraged.

Ludwig immediately felt a swelling of pride being praised by Feli, and couldn't help but calmly smile a little bit.

"Thank you, though I think some of it may have been luck rather than smarts." He said bashfully.

Italy suddenly kissed his cheek and then pecked him on the lips. "Don't be so modest you goofy German!" Italy commented with a small laugh.

"Hrrmm…" Ludwig grunted in response, but still smiled regardless.

"Ugh, you two are so ooey gooey with each other it makes me sick."

Ah, there was the other Italian, he had half been wondering when they'd encounter each other here, and he was sure it was inevitable that Romano would confront him in some way now that he was dating Feliciano.

"Romanooooo! Your supposed to be ooey gooey when you're in love!" Feliciano wrapped his arms around Ludwig's arm in an almost protective way that almost made him laugh.

"Whatever makes you feel fine with your sickening PDA." Lovino responded with a hand wave. "So I guess you got over your whole "Germany and America are tooooootally banging" thing, even though it was stupid obvious that wasn't the case." Romano commented.

Ludwig watched as Feliciano looked somewhat affronted. “If it was so obvious, why did you encourage me to go toe to toe with America?!”

Lovino stared at him. “ARE YOU TELLING ME YOU WERE SERIOUS??!”

Feliciano gaped at him. “OF COURSE I WAS SERIOUS! ROMANO YOU’RE THE ONE WHO TOLD ME NOT TO TAKE IT LYING DOWN??” He said back, raising his voice a bit.

“I DIDN’T THINK YOU WERE THAT STUPID?”

“You’re the stupid one fratello!”

“No, YOU’RE the stupid one!”

“I can’t believe you invoked grandfathers name if you weren’t serious!” Feliciano bit back.

“Oh sure, as if you don’t bring him up aaaall the time and act like you’re the only one who is related to him! You don’t seem to put that much weight in it.”

“That’s not at all true! I loved my grandpa! Of course I talk about him and I take him *very* seriously!”

“See there you go! *MY* grandpa, he’s mine too you know!”

“You *know* what I mean Fratello, I’m not saying he’s not!”

“*Do* I know that?!”

“Why do you have to be so mean?! Just because your jealous doesn’t mean you get to take everything out on me!!”

“HA! You’re so full of yourself you think I’d be jealous of you? Why would I be jealous of a little snake that acts all innocent to get what he wants and screw over everyone else?! Even family?!”

Feliciano gaped at him, Ludwig thought there might be steam coming out of his ears.

“Lovino Vargas! Would you stop blaming me for everything that’s ever went wrong for you?!”

Ludwig watched as the two brothers began arguing in Italian, catching a few curses here and there, both of their faces flushed as they ranted at each other. Maybe he should intervene, but while he had heard of Italy and Romano’s disagreements, he had never actually seen them argue before… it wasn’t *really* his business… well… maybe it sort of was… or… it had started that way but seeing Feliciano get heated out was a new one…

“Damn, what’s got them cursing at each other?”

Ludwig turned as Alfred walked up with his own plate of mixed servings of the other country's food.

"Er, well, it started with Romano teasing the 'gooey'-ness of mine and Italy's change in relationship… whatever that means, then I get the idea that maybe Italy felt as if Romano spurred him on in his 'facing' off against you over me… then the word stupid was thrown, but now I think their argument is on a new topic…" Ludwig noted, trying to think over if he got everything. "They're talking so fast, I can only pick out a few words… hmm…"

Alfred hummed as he chewed and swallowed his food.

"lotta cursing… should we do something?" Alfred wondered.

"I could always break their kneecaps! That would make them quiet!" Ivan suggested in a sing song voice.

Alfred patted Ivan's arm. "Nah, not this time babe."

"I was thinking the same… er… about stepping in, not breaking their kneecaps, Italy's curl only gets crooked when he's really upset…" Ludwig noted.

"I'm *sorry* his *curl???*" Alfred asked with raised eyebrows.

Ludwig just shrugged.

Alfred shook his head and handed Ivan his plate for safe keeping. "Hero time, hold my food for me, 'kay bae?"

Ivan nodded and happily took the plate. Ludwig watched warily as Alfred strode over to them.

"I did not realize both sides of Italy had such fire!" Ivan commented.

"Neither did I…" Ludwig had to admit.

"Look at my little Fredya being fireman to put out such flames." Ivan praised, tilting his head and watching Alfred in loving admiration.

Ludwig had to admit, seeing Ivan gush over Alfred was kind of adorable.

America in true fashion only had to put a hand on both their shoulders to get them to stop ranting and look at him in slight terror.

"Heeyyy come on, you're both pretty, we're all friends here! So lets cut the arguing okay?" Alfred suggested in a chipper voice.

Feliciano and Lovino immediately stiffened and turned away bitterly from each other.

"Besides! Romano, remember that time back in the industrial rev. when ya tried to square up to me too? It's all good, everyone tries to see if they can intimidate me at some point! We all

do silly things sometimes, but that doesn't mean we're dumb *overall*. So that's not fair right?" Alfred tried to encourage.

Feliciano shot Lovino a *look*. "You *dirty hypocrite!"*

Lovino turned red. "It was just a bluff dammit! I still wasn't serious, not like *you,* dipshit..."

Alfred looked between the two of them, looking up at Ludwig with a gaze that seemed to say *'uh… what now?'*

Ludwig took that as his cue.

"Ah, Italy, uh… I just realized, I left something in the hotel room, do you want to come with me?" Ludwig asked awkwardly intervening.

Italy's mood immediately seemed to brighten as if he hadn't just been in a fight where the words "whore" and "dumbass" had been exchanged, however he could still sense the urgency in his flip and willingness to leave the situation.

"Oh! Sure lets go Germany!" He agreed peppily, leaving his brother and America behind in a rush.

He noticed Spain gently encouraging Lovino to forget about it and have some Paella as he walked out with Italy, sending America a thankful look. He still was planning a way to show Alfred his appreciation for everything, perhaps he'd have to make some additions to his plan in light of this sudden situation.

When they were out of the room, Feliciano drooped slightly. "I know you didn't really forget anything Lulu… you're too organized for that. I'm sorry you and America had to step in when everything was so happy before." He said, rambling slightly.

Ludwig sighed, stopping in the hall, putting an arm around Feli so he could pull him to his chest.

"It's okay… though, do you always fight with your brother that badly?" Ludwig couldn't help but ask.

"Not always, sometimes I feel like we get along really well, but… even when we do get along I know he resents me…" Feli mumbled into him, before looking up timidly. "Though… Germany, I should say, that argument was more *mild*."

Ludwig sputtered. "*Mild?* You call that level of name calling and shade *mild*?"

Feliciano looked up at him with wide eyes. "Don't you and your brother ever fight like that??"

"The only time we started name calling and being hurtful was maybe once or twice when we were both *really* upset." Ludwig explained.

"…Oh." Feliciano looked even more deflated.

Ludwig furrowed his brows, just wanting to be able to wave a wand and make it better, no matter how impractical that was.

"…But..! Lovino is just kind of harsh sometimes. He doesn't mean to be mean… He's got a really good heart! It's just… he's always gotten the short end of the stick, and its really unfair, his bark is way worse than his bite." Feliciano defended.

Ludwig hummed. "You seem to understand why he acts a certain way, but he still aggravates you? I don't see you getting to the point of cursing around many people… Even when you were trying to 'intimidate' America, that was still just a glare and a bit of passive aggressiveness…" He said, half analyzing out loud.

"…It makes me upset because it's not my *fault*. I know grandpa gave me a lot more attention and doted on me, and I know when we were being kicked around by other countries, he was the *unwanted* one while I was fought over because everyone seemed to want to have me around. I know it has to hurt, I know I could never understand how much it hurt, but…but I was just a kid too! I didn't make all of them do that! But it feels like no matter what I do he keeps blaming me. I know I'm an easy target and I can be ditzy sometimes, but I have feelings too!"

Ludwig listened carefully, running his hands through Italy's hair as he talked. He allowed Italy to grip onto him tighter and tighter and occasionally kissed his forehead as he talked, having found that was something that seemed to help his boyfriend relax.

"Wahh… what a mess, I was only a little annoyed, I know he was just coming over to tease, I didn't mean for it to escalate!" Italy said, chastising himself.

"You two have a lot of unresolved history, sometimes when it just sits like that it blows up over something that seems small." Ludwig said, thoughtfully.

Feliciano nodded sadly and went limp in defeat.

"I'm… I'm not trying to act innocent to hurt or manipulate anyone either…" Feliciano sniffled slightly. "He really thinks I'm that bad??"

Ludwig rubbed Feliciano's back and hugged him tighter. "Probably not. It's like you said, he's just hurt and lashing out."

"Why did I have to argue back? What's with me lately?" Italy mumbled to himself. "I'm so much more worried about seeming macho or strong or cool or whatever than I used to..."

Ludwig's heart sank a little as he furrowed his brows. Unable to help but think this growing complex in Italy was partially *his* fault. After all, his own fears around appearing masculine and *mature* had caused him to repress and hide every cute thing he liked, and even grow angry when he saw other men around him act '*weak*', as if he had to stamp it out in everyone else in order to stamp it out of *himself*.

He couldn't help himself, he leaned over a bit more and tilted Italy's head up with one hand so he could kiss him. Wondering if he could convey how much Italy was *more* than *enough*,

how *sorry* he was if he had ever added to him feeling like this.

Italy kissed back and stroked his cheek in return with one hand, and began rubbing his waist with the other.

When they parted they were both a little out of breath.

“You… You really know how to give comforting kisses Lulu.” Feli said, slightly flushed.

“Ah… well… I was improvising but…” Ludwig swallowed hard. “Feli if I’ve… If I’ve ever made you feel bad for doing things some might see as… not masculine, I’m sorry.”

Feliciano stared at him. “L-Luddy…”

“It was always my own issues, not yours. I know… with America… part of it was feeling like you had to prove yourself to me, that maybe I wouldn’t like you if you weren’t ‘masculine’ enough. But you’ve always been strong, and very much a man, but in a way that was way healthier than me, don’t *loose* that. You have the confidence to love what you love, while I tried to hide every cute thing that I liked because I was *ashamed*. I know… I know how scary it can be to be mocked for not being ‘manly’ enough, or daring to like anything associated with women… and I’m sorry if I contributed it to it.” He confessed.

Feli stared for a moment before grabbing his face and kissing all over it as he responded. “My sweet, sweet Germany...” He praised.

Ludwig really loved the kiss-peppering Italy tended to do, it made him weak in the knees and feel like smiling like a dummkopf.

“We’ve all been hurting feeling like we have to be a certain way as men, haven’t we?” Feliciano said and Ludwig had to nod in agreement.

Italy ran his thumb over Ludwig’s bottom lip affectionately and thoughtfully for a moment, Ludwig quietly melted a bit more.

“Not all of me wanting to impress you comes from that though… I meant it when I mentioned I just want you to feel like your taken care of and protected the same way you’ve made me feel, and maybe I sometimes wish I could pick you up and literally sweep you off your feet!” Italy said, staring at him adoringly.

Ludwig hummed and draped his arms around Italy’s shoulders, fully and completely feeling like a puddle from Italy’s words.

“With that kind of talk, you better hope you can lift me up because you’re making my legs feel like they might give out.”

Feliciano suddenly looked up at him with a slightly mischievous grin. “Can I try??”

Ludwig furrowed his brows warily. “…you can try, but… please be careful, don’t hurt yourself… and don’t lift with your back!”

“Prepare to board the U.S.S. Italy Captain!” Italy declared cheerfully, taking a step back to plan his strategy.

“Is that a euphemism for something else?” Ludwig asked raising an eyebrow.

Feliciano just winked in response.

He then put one arm on Germany’s back, and leaned down to make an attempt at scooping up his legs.

Ludwig prepared himself as he let Feliciano make his attempt. He had already planned how he would shield his head if he fell too far backwards, and how he would move if Italy was about to fall…

He felt himself being tilted back… his feet leaving the ground… then…

He looked at Italy as he grunted just a little as he adjusted his grip slightly and Ludwig quickly used his arms to help with holding himself up.

They stared at each other, Feliciano looking about as shocked as Ludwig had to look as well. It might have looked incredibly strange if someone walked by with Ludwig being the taller of the two, but Feliciano was holding him, successfully.

“Ha… I did it?” Feliciano stammered, going from shocked to overjoyed. “I did it! I did it! Germany! I’m carrying you!!! Now you can see how fun it is!”

Ludwig beamed at him. “Yeah! You are! How do your legs feel, your arms, your back? Is anything feel uncomfortable?” He asked.

He doubted Italy would be able to hold him forever or move very far with him, but so far it was… stable…

And it was nice… it was nice being carried, it was taking a break from being the one doing it.

“I’m doing okay! Heheh… Germany I kind of want to carry you up to our room like this. I want to see how far I can get! I knew according to my boss Italy was stronger these days but I didn’t think it would translate since I don’t have big muscles!”

Ludwig nodded in awe… he kind of wanted to see how far Italy could take him too… He was still slightly worried Italy might snap his back doing so but… also…

“Hmph, I’m counting on you Italy.” He responded with a cheeky smile, leaning his head against Italy’s shoulder and curling his legs a bit more slightly so they didn’t stick out *quite* so far.

Italy grinned in determination and began walking with him down the hall. They had to pause at one point as Feli finally had his arms get tired, but he made it an impressive length, so Ludwig suggested making it to their room normally and Italy could carry him in.

This seemed to make Italy even more excited, so, with promise of room-based-entertainment, they made it to their room, he was lifted up again, and Ludwig quietly dodged accidently having his head smacked against the doorframe… He was just happy to cheer his sweetheart up and distract him for a while.

Chapter End Notes

Italy and Romano have some issues to sort out methinks

Complications

Chapter Notes

> Setting up some more angst. Basically, I'm going to keep going with this fic until I run out of ideas. Its pretty self indulgent, but hopefully it will still be the kind of enjoyable self indulgence ya'll like reading lolol

Ludwig in all his years of sleeping with Italy by his side had never quite gotten over how *warm* Feli was. No wonder they had always ended up cuddling even back when Ludwig had fiercely tried to deny any closeness or attraction.

Their sleep schedules had also synced up, Ludwig now found himself getting sleepy in the afternoon and taking a nap with his Italian, and Feliciano sometimes got up at sunrise with him on work days.

It had turned out their escapade ended up falling in line with their usual ‘getting ready for downtime’ anyway, so it had sort of worked out. So, coming down from the afterglow after everything was cleaned up and comfy, he simply hugged his Italian close, letting the man gently run his fingers through his hair and whisper sweet words into his ear as they fell into a light sleep.

He woke up again before Italy as usual. In past he might have gotten up to try and do something productive with his time, but he allowed himself to stay there as Italy continued to sleep and let himself drift into thought.

He couldn’t help but think back to the Italian brother’s fight. Come to think of it… their relationship had always been strained, hadn’t it? When Germany had first met Romano he had been… defensive and especially protective of his brother, at first coming up with wild schemes to try intimidate him into not being around Italy… despite the fact that Germany at the time had pointed out he wouldn’t be able to get rid of Italy even if he wanted to.

And Italy had talked up Romano to him many times and encouraged him not to take Romano’s… *aggression* too seriously. All bark… no bite…

So clearly they didn’t hate each other, at least not to the point of never wanting to talk to each other or purposefully hurting each other… that being said… with everything he had witnessed and what Italy had told him… he wondered if they continued to not resolve this that it might get to that point someday.

He sighed. He knew it wasn’t necessarily his job to fix this, or to meddle in their personal affairs, but he *did* care about Italy… he wondered if maybe there could be some sort of solution that wouldn’t be too invasive…

He couldn't imagine if his relationship with his brother was that dramatically complicated especially… … especially now….

Part of him honestly wasn't sure if he wanted to meddle to help… or to feel in control of something… maybe it was a combination of both, and he didn't know if it was healthy.

Suddenly he realized Italy was awake and massaging the space in between his brows with his thumb.

"Such a serious face LuLu! What were you thinking about?" Italy teased.

Ludwig blushed, wondering how long Feli had been awake and watching his expressions change with his thoughts.

"Oh… you know, this and that…" He said vaguely, wanting to smack himself for sounding a bit like an idiot.

"This and that hmm?" Italy mused before snuggling into his chest with a little smile. "Better not be thinking of work, it's relaxing time!"

Ludwig sighed and pet Feliciano's head. "You're right, you're right…"

Feli hummed, bringing his hand up lazily squeezed his waist slightly before running his hand up and down to stroke it slightly. Every time Feli did that, it took everything in Ludwig not to twitch or make a weird noise… even if they were a couple now, he still was going to refuse to disclose the fact his sides were incredibly ticklish, he *refused* to give Italy access to that kind of power, for now at least.

"Though… hey Germany, can I ask a question?" Italy said slowly.

Ludwig rolled his eyes. "You know, when people say "can I ask you a question", haven't you already asked a question? So, you may as well." He pointed out before smirking and raising his eyebrows to show he was joking.

"Alright mister smarty pants, calm down." Feliciano said, taking his turn to roll his eyes and shake his head. "I should say its because I want to ask a *serious* question…"

Ludwig adjusted himself so he was propping up his head with his hand so he could look at Italy a little more properly and give him that serious attention to his question, gaze shifting to one of slight concern.

"Why… *was* your brother not there today? He knew he was invited too, right?" Italy asked slowly, now sitting up and hugging one of the pillows.

Ludwig felt his stomach sink and his heartbeat slow. He slowly sat up himself, and found himself pulling his knees to his chest, something he had done often when he was a sickly child. He didn't like thinking about it… it was easier not to think about it… he had been distracting himself all day.

Feli scooted a little closer to him and lightly touched his shoulder in concern. “Germany?” He asked worriedly.

“…He’s sick. He’s been bed ridden for three days now… I wanted to stay behind with him, but he insisted I go…” He admitted slowly, squeezing his own legs even tighter.

Feli gazed at him in alarm. “He’s sick? But countries don’t get sick unless…” Feli visibly paled. “Something is really wrong…”

The last time in recent history he heard of a country being sick was England during WWII…

Ludwig slowly nodded. “He hasn’t been healing quickly anymore either… and he keeps lying about it, but I *know* he’s not.” He said almost… angry… He didn’t know why thinking of his brother and what was happening caused him to get almost… aggressive, as if he wanted to fight… *something* but he didn’t know what.

“Oh… Oh no… poor Gilbert…” Feli said worriedly as he began thinking, biting his lip slightly as he did so. “If you want Luddy, we can go now, I could make your brother some tortellini soup! Er… unless maybe you want to be alone with him?” Feli offered, now rubbing his back soothingly.

Ludwig let out a long breath and slowly forced himself to unfurl from his previous position. “No, I think he’d like to see you and…”

Frankly… he didn’t want to be alone back home with just him and his brother and the sickness.

“…I want you to be around… if you don’t mind.” He confessed.

“Of course, I don’t mind LuLu, I’m more than happy to be there for you tesoro.”

Feli had felt slightly guilty that Ludwig had once again spent the afternoon comforting *him* when his brother was ill. Granted, he couldn’t have known, Ludwig was… very good at pretending to be unbothered… Honestly Italy knew he was bad about being honest when he wasn’t happy or speaking when something was wrong. Even so, he had *noticed* Gilbert wasn’t there earlier, and he hadn’t *asked* then…

He didn’t think Ludwig would blame him either, but he still felt like kicking himself. He was going to make some damn good tortellini soup, that was for sure…

He held Ludwig’s hand tightly the whole way back to his home, he hoped it wasn’t that bad, but he *knew* Ludwig’s brother, he knew he wouldn’t stay solitary if he didn’t have to. He drifted into the haunting thought that Ludwig and Gilbert’s situation wasn’t that different from his and Romano’s… being that Gilbert and Ludwig were sort of like East and West Germany, and him and Romano were North and South Italy.

The nature of their very existence was… mysterious, and all of them didn’t quite understand their nature as personifications vs. who they were as people or the rules of their own reality.

Why was Gilbert falling ill and potentially… fading away, but Romano… wasn't? Or…

Feli's heart stopped for a moment as the thought crossed his mind that *what if it was happening, but he didn't know? Just hadn't noticed because they aren't as close as Ludwig and Gilbert are???*

A deep fear he had never addressed of loosing someone he loved *again* made him feel dizzy and like he wasn't quite in his body. He leaned a bit more into Germany as they walked inside, trying to force himself back down to earth. He had to be here for his Germany right now, he couldn't get caught up on 'what ifs' and memories like that right now.

"Brother? I'm home, Italy is with me." Ludwig called out.

Feliciano watched as Gilbert came into view, stumbling out of the living room, likely having just been laying down. To his horror, Gilbert somehow looked paler than usual, but it was that distinct *sickly* pale, his eyes were sunken in and tired looking. He seemed like he had lost weight and muscle mass too… He looked… he looked…

He looked like Rome did before he dissolved…

And just like his grandpa, Gilbert was still there grinning and putting on a brave face to meet them.

"My little brother and one of my favorite Italians! How did it go? I hope you brought something back for me!"

Ludwig nodded. "Ah… yes, I managed to grab a few extra samples of things, Italy is going to make tortellini soup too." He confirmed, holding up the large paper bag that held several different samples of the meals that had been on display.

Gilbert took the bag excitedly. "Wunderbar! You two are spoiling me…" He peeked into the bag then winked at both of them. "All deserved tribute for someone like me!" He announced with a cackle.

Feli laughed along despite the melancholy in his heart and the deep sadness he could see on Ludwig's face despite smiling slightly at his brother's joke.

He began making his soup, watching the two brothers start putting things away.

"Brother, go lie down." Ludwig lectured.

"I've been laying down all day west! I'm sick of it, I've got a nasty bed-based-cramp in my side from it!" Gilbert countered.

Ludwig looked back in exasperation, but stopped arguing.

Feli continued his chopping of ingredients. Wondering *why* this was happening… and if he could somehow do something to stop it.

How do you save a dying personification?

Can you save them?

The gears in Feliciano's brain began turning… and moment by moment he felt more and more like calling his brother… the haunting feeling sticking with him of 'what if the next time we fight it's the last time we ever talk and I regret it forever?'

He bit his lip. There had to be *something*, some explanation. But god dammit, he didn't even know why or how Holy Rome had died, Germany probably only looked similar because he took up the same region… maybe… who knew?! Why were they given such long lives if their loved ones could be ripped away from them without any logic or reason? They could survive a bullet to the head, but one day they might just… dissolve, disappear… it wasn't fair. Why was it that China could fall apart so many times, but still live as the same person? Why was it that Grandpa Rome couldn't have become something else? Gilbert had been the Teutonic Knights before Prussia… so why was he not fine as East Germany now? What the hell was happening?

Feli felt a bit like letting out a string of curses, but cursing made him think of his brother, so instead he took it out on the garlic he was crushing.

Determination filled him.

No, he wasn't going to let this happen, he couldn't just do nothing, maybe it was deranged hope to have, but he couldn't let Germany lose his brother.

He was going to get to the bottom of this, he had never considered himself much of an investigator, but… maybe if he couldn't be strong, he could be a good detective. He had too many questions, and not enough answers, he didn't like to see his hopefully-future-brother-in-law looking so ill and potentially dissolving, and he didn't want Ludwig to go through that pain of loss, not *ever*. Not if he could help it.

As the weeks went by… Alfred had noticed Ivan being… clingy, for lack of a better word. Not that he minded exactly, but sometimes, lately… he was getting a little paranoid if Alfred so much as left the room to go to the bathroom or get a snack.

Now don't anyone get it twisted, Alfred was a snuggler and pretty clingy himself, but Ivan was…

It made Alfred feel like Ivan thought he might spontaneously combust or disappear forever if he didn't keep him in his sight.

On one hand, he half thought he should just be real and tell Ivan to pull back a little… but at the same time like… would that be mean?

He was grateful and adored having this big guy around…

On the other hand…for christs sake a guy needed some space and breathing room too. He felt a bit like a cat that was being pet so much their hair was starting to come loose. And dear god the last thing he wanted was to get tired of the best thing in his life.

On the other other hand, Ivan *was* so important to him… what if telling him to cool it sent him away forever?? He didn't want that either…

On the other other *other* hand Alfred had to be alone for a meeting or something, Ivan seemed to *always* manage to be there on the other side of the door as soon as he went to leave to scare the living daylights out of him and make Alfred want to ask "*Exactly how long have you been standing there??!"*

Alfred… admittedly didn't do well feeling like he was *watched* or on a short leash… not that Ivan thought of him like that but… gAH.

It was all way too confusing. Since when had spending every waking moment with your favorite person felt so… *weird*. This wasn't how he had pictured it at all… but maybe he was just being too prickly? Happily ever after meant like… you were happy together all the time… right?

No matter what, Alfred felt like *something* had to shift, or he might loose his god damned mind. He had to find out if this was just Ivan being Ivan and not knowing any better or…

Something… god forbid… was wrong.

Time after Time

Chapter Summary

Alfred needs some time.
Feli and Gilbert bond and Gilbert confirms a thought that had already been on the back of Feli's mind...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alfred sighed, the meetings of the day giving him a massive headache. As usual he just played up acting stupid to get detractors off his back so he could focus on the things he actually gave a damn about, but that didn't mean he enjoyed it.

He touched the door handle and sighed, already knowing who would be there, so he prepared himself so he wouldn't be jump scared like he had several other times.

Just as he thought, he walked out and saw Ivan patiently waiting for him. Didn't this guy also have a boss to be harassed by???

Alfred felt a pang of guilt at wishing Ivan wasn't there. Really, who was he complain at getting so much attention? The poor guy had been standing there for him and here he was being 'ugh' about it! He guilted himself into letting it go as he normally did and strode over to him.

"Hey big guy, how long you been out here?"

"Not long, I actually had to rush a bit because I thought I might be late to you getting out! But your meeting ran 10 minutes long, so it is not a problem!" Ivan declared happily.

Alfred scratched his head, feeling like he hadn't told Ivan when he'd be starting and ending meetings today, but didn't comment on it further.

"Well, I could seriously use a frapp or a iced coffee or something because boy am I hot and it is *sooo* coffee time." He declared, already walking knowing Ivan would follow close behind.

"You have had a lot of coffee today… Can't you perish from drinking too much??" Ivan asked suddenly.

Strange… Ivan hadn't commented on it before.

America snorted. “I mean, yeah, I guess – but it’s pretty rare even if you do O.D. on it… besides you know too much Vodka can be deadly too.” He said poking fun at him. “Besides, if I die its not really a big deal for us, right?”

“It is still not pleasant.” Ivan said wearily. “I hope you never have to have your head departed from your body, it is such a hassle!”

“Francey-boi has mentioned that too… doesn’t uh… sound fun.” Alfred commented.

“No, it is not fun. You know you are still conscious for a few moments after you are separated from your body?” Ivan said cheerfully.

“Cool. That’s disturbing.”

“да!”

Ivan could be so weird about saying disturbing things in a cheery voice sometimes… though he also tended to say scary or intimidating things while putting on a smile, so he couldn’t judge too much.

He walked along with Ivan, sighing as he massaged his head and tried to enjoy the nice spring air. Just then he was suddenly lifted up. He flailed in surprised as he was deposited back on the ground, now on the other side of the sidewalk so Ivan was now closest to the road.

“What was that about?” Alfred demanded a little bit more harshly than he meant to.

“You should walk on side not by street! Less dangerous.” Ivan explained.

Alfred stared at him. Ivan realized even if somehow a car came flying off the road that *Alfred* would be more likely to be able to stop it without getting hurt… right?

“Aw come on man, I’m a strong boy, I can handle anything that comes at me.” Alfred tried to joke.

He didn’t *really* care about what side of the sidewalk he was on… but he didn’t really like this sudden treating him like some fragile damsel thing that was happening here…

“No.” Ivan said simply and stubbornly. “Besides! You know it is proper to have your partner walk on inside! It dates back to when people would dump their…”

“GAHHH England has already told me this story about ya’ll’s people’s gross medieval practices! I don’t want to think about it!” Alfred yelped, covering his ears.

He was really glad he was born after some sorts of *sanitary* measures were set in stone.

“Well good! Then you understand. Better me than you!” Ivan replied.

Alfred grumbled.

He's being considerate. He told himself.

He's treating me like a god damned wilting flower! I'm the hero dammit!! He argued back with himself.

Whatever, he was going to get caffeine… though despite knowing it had less than he wanted he got a Frappuccino because god dammit he really needed the sugar and the brain freeze right now.

With Frappuccino finally in hand he started to relax a little bit, starting to once again not mind Ivan following him. It was nice being out with him after all.

They were almost home, and Alfred had turned to talk to Ivan about a cute picture of a dog Ludwig had sent him that had popped into his head when he realized Ivan was focused and looking concerned at his phone.

"Watcha readin' there buddy?" He asked curiously.

"I was looking up ingredients in drink you are consuming… why does American products have so many strange ingredients? These don't seem safe…"

Alfred felt his eye twitch as he sucked in a long sip of his drink out of spite.

"Well, I've been *fine* so far, so I don't think it matters…" He bit back as they went inside together.

This was really starting to push it.

"But Alfred! What if suddenly somehow it isn't fine? You don't actually know how much you can take!" Ivan argued back.

Alfred almost felt guilty again as he looked at Ivan's face that was filled with only concern and no sort of ill will. But dammit! He was an adult! He wasn't stupid either!

"Ivan there's like a million things out there that could kill me, but that doesn't mean…"

"Exactly!" Ivan interrupted, grabbing his shoulders. "Maybe you can take more than average weak human, but if you play with fate too much it will come back to hurt you! What if your boss sends you to war again? What if you are a target for attack?! What if your strange alien friend decides one day to do strange experiments?! What if you are hit by train coming off the rails!?? What if one of those satellites falls out of the sky and hits you!? What if you get sick? Or something you eat burns hole in your stomach? Or..!" Ivan rambled in what seemed like a blind panic.

"IVAN!" Alfred interrupted, shoulders being squeezed so hard he was worried Ivan might accidently leave a bruise and then get even more freaked out… it had been bad enough when the big guy had left a hickey on him for the first time and Alfred had to spend at least 30 minutes telling him it didn't hurt and he didn't mind *and he in-fact liked it*.

But more importantly, this did it. This was the kicker in deciding for sure why he had been feeling tiffed.

He was feeling smothered.

Ivan stared at him in stunned silence.

Alfred took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. “Jesus Christ babe, *breathe*.”

Ivan didn’t sound like he was really breathing well despite Alfred’s comment.

Alfred looked at him again, it really didn’t help his head was still throbbing, he was half worried it might turn into a full migraine.

“Look… I *appreciate* you worrying about me, but I can take care of myself okay? All of this extra attention is freaking me out!” He blurted out.

His tact was lacking today and he knew it.

Ivan furrowed his brows. “I am scaring you??”

“Wh… no! I mean, a little bit, but like not in a ‘your gonna hurt me way’! But like… goddamned your around me *all* the time, and now you’re acting like I might explode or something. I’m not some delicate princess or something!” He bit, feeling bad as he raised his.

Ivan just looked stunned at being yelled at and Alfred immediately felt even more guilty.

“…I know that…”

“Do you??” Alfred snapped despite himself.

“Do you… do you no longer want me around? Did I… did I mess up whole relationship??” Ivan asked with wide eyes.

Alfred groaned. “You’re being so *dramatic* I swear. No! It’s not that… fucking…” He pinched the bridge of his nose and took in a few deep breaths. “Look, Ivan, I love you, you hear me? But I’m *tired*, I love having you around but I need space too… probably especially right now.”

Ivan just looked more confused. “I do not understand, you like having me around… but you do not want me around?”

Alfred stared at him, almost needing to take a moment to see if he was serious. He tried desperately with his weary mind to figure out a better way to say it.

“Ugh… look, let me put it this way… I just need a little break, okay? I’m already not in a good mood and the sudden thing with *coddling* me just set me off… okay? I’m sorry.” He tried to explain.

Ivan tilted his head. “You need break?” He paused. “…you are tired of me…” He stated sadly.

Alfred panicked and took Ivan’s hands. “No… nononononono… I just need time *right now*, I still want to be with you, I’m still your boyfriend. I just need some alone time… okay? You know how crowds get grating for you after a while? That’s like what’s going on with me right now! Its that kind of tired.”

Ivan seemed to finally settle down with this explanation. “Yes… I think I understand now…” He paused before hiding his mouth in his scarf. “I am sorry sunflower.”

Alfred sighed, standing up on his toes and kissing Ivan’s cheek.

“It’s okay… I’m sorry too. Look… why don’t you head home and clear your head, and I’ll get some rest and do the same. I’ll call you tomorrow, okay?” He suggested.

Ivan slowly nodded and pressed a long kiss to his forehead before gradually letting go. He looked like he wanted to say something else for a moment but decided against it.

“I will talk to you tomorrow then little one.”

“Talk to ya then big guy…” Alfred responded. Still feeling those conflicting thoughts as he watched Ivan go.

He felt like an asshole for snapping at him…

But seriously he didn’t want to be hyper controlled just because something maybe might sort of hurt him maybe. It also just made him think of when England would lecture him about what he did or ate all the time… and the last thing he wanted was to connect anything having to do with him and Ivan with him and England, so this *had* to be nipped in the bud.

Also his headache was getting worse… and he really just wanted to lay down in a cool dark space.

Feliciano carefully put the finished soup on a tray as Ludwig was pouring some cool water. Gilbert, despite his efforts had finally not been able to keep standing and had started getting weary and needed to lay back down in his room.

“Go ahead of me, will you Feli? I need to clean up here or it will bug me and my brother.” Ludwig said with a slight teasing tone despite the fact Feli could see the energy and color draining from his boyfriend’s face.

“Si! You can count on me!” He replied cheerfully, picking up the tray and carefully taking it down to Gilbert’s room.

He was often clumsy, but when it came to getting food to its destination, he was oddly balanced. He brought in the soup with a smile, Gilbert setting down the book he was reading to sit up again.

“Geeze kept the amazing me waiting long enough, but I can already smell it was worth the wait.” Gilbert teased.

“Hehe! I hope so!” Feliciano cheered.

Feli sat on the edge of the bed as Gilbert tried it.

“Gah… god damn that’s good.” He whined. “Not fair, you’re totally better than me at cooking!”

“Awww your too sweet Gilbert!”

“Damn right I am, sweet as sugar.”

Feli laughed with him.

“Soooo you and west getting on well now? When’s the wedding??”

Feli laughed and turned a bit red. “I think so! I don’t know if we’ve thought about marriage yet though!”

“Never too early!” Gilbert replied with a wink.

Feli shook his head, half wondering if wanting to rush it wasn’t just Gilbert teasing, but also half wanting to be around long enough to see it.

“Hey future big brother, can I ask you a… *serious* question?”

Gilbert raised his eyebrows. “Well now that you’ve called me that, absolutely!” He said, seemingly overjoyed.

Italy chuckled before diving into his question. “Ludwig mentioned he was super sickly as a kid, and there was another time he said the reason he looks older than he is is because he had a body beforehand… and I just thought since you raised him…”

Gilbert took another few bites of soup as he listened to Italy’s question. “Hmm… I see, trying to unlock my brother’s backstory, huh?”

“Well…” Italy replied sheepishly.

Gilbert laughed. “It’s fine, I get it… its true, little west was super sick for a long time, and almost didn’t make it… its why I was working so hard unifying Germany! Which is a pain when you have a nation that broke up into so many pieces.” He explained.

“You really worked super hard to save your little brother!” Italy noted.

“Yeah! And I was cool and amazing doing it!!” He declared before coughing a few times.

“Then… who was Germany before Germany then? Was he just a nameless child country for a while like America?” He asked.

Gilbert hummed. “I’m half wondering if I should really be the one to give such a dramatic reveal…”

Feli stared at him, his heart skipping a beat. “Why… would it be dramatic?”

Gilbert inhaled deeply, seemingly deciding on something. “Austria said you and Holy Rome had some sort of puppy love thing going on right? Back when Everyone thought you were a girl and didn’t bother to ask or check?”

“S-Si…” Feli stammered.

“Germany… and Holy Rome are the same person…” Gilbert said slowly.

Feli’s heart had gone from not beating at all to beating a million miles per minute as the words Gilbert had just spoken repeated and echoed through his mind that he thought might overheat.

He had thought before that maybe… but… it was for sure..?

“If… if that’s true… then why?” Feli found himself stammering.

“Well… see the thing is, when he ‘died’, France himself had never intended to mortally injure him… and with us being countries he hadn’t really considered the fight might *actually* have long term damage. I nearly ripped his head off despite that… we all get desensitized to war, but that was one of the times it actually got to me…” Gilbert coughed. “But the battle had left little West… *broken*, his small empire was shattering, both the physical damage done to him in battle and his country falling apart was *traumatic*, I think he was dying several times over because his body couldn’t quite heal… but it was just enough that he couldn’t fully stay *dead*… that’s why I never told him either… I was worried if his other memories were sparked then…”

“Then… he might remember something really awful and traumatic…” Italy finished with a quiet nod.

His heart ached, he felt like crying and wishing back then as a little boy he had been more insistent that Holy Rome not leave… but he knew how it worked. Maybe even if Holy Rome had wanted to stay, his people and his boss wouldn’t have let him despite how young he was. None of them ever did. It was better that Ludwig got what remained of his childhood without those memories weighing him down, even if it meant he grew up too fast.

“I won’t tell him either.” Italy confirmed to reassure Germany’s older brother.

Gilbert reached a hand up and pat Feliciano in a head. “You’re a good man Italy… even if your totally lame and weak compared to me.”

Feli laughed a little bit. “I’m glad to have your approval.” He said sincerely.

Gilbert grinned again. “But yeah, luckily, I managed to start pulling his country back together, and he was able to start healing. Even after he was unified, he couldn’t really walk for a while, but then his people and culture started developing, and he grew stronger with it…

at least that's what I think." He puffed out his chest. "Its cool if you want to continue praising me!"

"You're super cool Prussia!" Italy declared.

"Damn right I am!"

They both heard Ludwig finally heading down the stairs to join them.

"Ich bin endlich bei dir, Bruder." Germany said, sitting down next to Italy. "I finished up the kitchen so we wouldn't worry about it."

"Perfect, that would have bugged me." Gilbert confessed, finishing the last bits of his soup. "Your super lucky you're dating an amazing cook west, it was way too many potatoes for us for way too long."

"What's wrong with potatoes?" Ludwig said, blinking in both slight amusement and shock at his brother's words.

Gilbert hummed, seemingly not sure about why he had just said what he said either. "… huh… maybe my tastes have changed. Or maybe Italy is just so good at making delicious food its blown potatoes out of the water!"

"I'm honored Gilbert!" Italy said with a happy grin as he hugged Ludwig's arm.

With Gilbert fed and encouraged to try and sleep, Feliciano helped clean up the last bowl and cup after bringing the tray up.

He was unable to help his gaze drifting over to Ludwig more than normal. Thinking over the realization… the truth that had been revealed that he swore he'd keep locked tight close to his chest for his sweetheart's sake.

But it really was him… Ludwig was that same boy he had fallen in love with all those years ago, sobbed over losing many a night, dreamt of so many times. For so long he had felt like he still was waiting for Holy Rome to come back even though to his knowledge that would be impossible.

And yet… somehow, they had found each other again. Even if Ludwig didn't remember anymore, he still found him. He still loved him.

They had fallen in love all over again.

It really felt like… they were simply meant to be.

Feli suddenly realized he had started crying, and put his hand over his mouth as he *accidentally* had let out a choked sob. Ludwig immediately turned from drying off his hands in alarm.

"F-Feli?" He stammered, immediately rushing to him.

Feliciano melted on how immediately Germany cupped his face and wiped a tear away from his cheek with his thumb.

“What’s wrong??” He asked, beautiful baby-blue eyes wide with concern.

Feli laughed in the middle of a sob. “I was just thinking… how much I love you.”

Ludwig sighed “Liebling…”

Germany leaned forward and kissed him deeply as Feli wrapped his arms around Ludwig’s waist to pull him closer.

“Your a ridiculous dramatic man…” Ludwig said as he caught his breath. “I love you too.”

Feli gazed up into his loving face and felt like he wanted to cry and laugh even more. “Si… I am dramatic, especially when it comes to the man I love more than anything else in the world, even more than pasta and siestas!”

He kissed both of Ludwig’s warm blushing cheeks, he could feel Ludwig’s heart pounding away in his chest.

“You…I… o h…” Ludwig stammered.

Feli pressed a finger to Ludwig’s lips teasingly before tracing over them softly.

“You don’t have to say another word *amore della mia vita,* I can hear your heart well enough to know what you mean.”

Chapter End Notes

hopefully I got the translation correct, but "amore della mia vita" means "love of my life"!

Honesty

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ivan was laying alone for the first time in a while thinking over their couple spat. It was normal for couples to argue sometimes – he tried to remind himself.

America had absolutely expressed being overwhelmed and uncomfortable, thus this break-wanting. Alfred didn't seem to like him being too protective of him… but it was normal to want to protect your special someone from being hurt... right? He didn't quite understand Alfred's reaction fully despite wanting to. Weren't couples a unit? Meant to be together all the time? Maybe Alfred really was more than just 'tired for now' of their relationship! Afterall, sometimes when he stopped wanting to be in a crowd he would isolate himself for quite a while…

He needed advice, he concluded.

But that would wait until morning.

However, the whole night he tried to sleep, he found the warmth from his sunflower missing disturbing. Despite knowing somewhere deep down he was being ridiculous, he couldn't help but stress that Alfred would somehow vanish or perish with him not having his eyes on him. Their relationship still felt unreal. Deep down Ivan felt like he knew it wasn't Alfred that was fragile or in danger, it was this new sort of frontier of being with another person. He didn't understand how to properly be in *any* kind of relationship. He never had.

When sunlight finally streamed through the window, Ivan was half not even sure he slept at all.

The next question came of who would he go to for advice? Which one of his friends that he sometimes wasn't sure were friends of his could he ask?

France was supposedly 'the most romantic countries', and he had been one of the countries that raised Alfred, so perhaps he would know?

So, he called France as he stalked down to his kitchen for breakfast. He soon heard France's flirty voice that grated on him pick up happily.

"Hello my friend! How are you this fine morning?"

Ivan half felt France mostly just sucked up to him for his oil and minerals, but maybe he'd be okay with this if he could learn something.

"Привет France! All is not well I am afraid! I need your unique type of advice." Ivan said honestly.

"Oui? What is it you're having trouble with?" Francis asked.

“It is relationship based, I’m afraid.” He admitted. “Alfred has grown rather tired with way I have shown affection, and I am not sure what to do differently.”

“Oh dear, already? That is a problem, hmm…” France said, only making Ivan’s heart sink. “In that case, have you tried doing something… *spicy?*” Ivan could almost hear France smirking through the phone, which only confused him further.

“Spicy?” He asked in befuddlement. “Should I give him spicy food???”

“Ohoho, no that’s not what I meant by spicy… you know the sort of thing you do with your partner to shake things up when your love life gets boring! Like… tying them up maybe?”

Ivan stopped as he was pulling milk for his cereal out of the fridge. “Why would I tie Fredya up if we are no longer enemies??”

This only made France laugh. “Well, you see you don’t stop at the tying up! What you do is you ***** then *****with a ********** and if you want to get even more interesting you can **********and ********** in **********!!”

Ivan nearly dropped his milk and broke his phone, at the last second he instead opted to slam down the milk on the counter and quickly hang up before wrapping his scarf around his head and silently screaming into it. He felt like he had just heard something forbidden and now he was incredibly embarrassed.

Doing something like that to his sunflower???

…. Then again…

NO absolutely not! What was wrong with him? This was worse than his older sister’s “show them your boobs” advice!

He chided himself wondering if he should clean out his ears with bleach to cause enough brain damage to forget that conversation. Why had he thought France would be a good idea? That was the worst idea! Of course he’d suggest something strange and embarrassing!

He didn’t feel much like eating anymore, his stomach now doing flip flops.

Who else could he ask?

Oh! Of course! His new best friend!

He texted Italy instead of calling him though, feeling like he had suddenly developed a fear of talking on the phone for the moment.

“*Good morning my friend! I hope you are well. I have problem in my relationship with Amerika, and I require advice! He has grown weary of my approach with him, and I am not sure what to do!”*

Ivan finally managed to get himself to start eating and was halfway through his frankly bland (He had been eating at Alfred's house a lot… was he developing a taste for sugar soaked cereal??) bowl of cereal when he received a text back.

"*Oh no! That's terrible news! Weary how?? – and I'm doing okay! Me and LuLu and Gilbert are sitting outside having espresso~! :P"*

"Alfred said he was wanting some alone time, he has said he will call me later today… so maybe I am thinking too hard but… He seemed very angry after I expressed a lot of concerned for his safety. I myself am not entirely sure why I am so convinced he might suddenly become damaged or vanish!!" He said honestly, deleting and retyping a few times to figure out exactly what he wanted to say.

"*Oooh I see! Well America likes being independent and heroic, maybe he felt like maybe you were taking that from him? Even if you didn't mean to! I understand being scared you might loose someone precious to you and that it can make you do everything you can to keep them with you. But its like if you hug someone too tight and don't let go you might hurt them!"*

Ivan leaned on one hand, reading Italy's response a few times. He hadn't thought of it like that. America did value his 'independence' a lot… he got a sinking feeling in his stomach… had he pulled an England by overly worrying about America leaving??? Doing anything that could potentially remind Fredya of his tumultuous relationship with his former guardian made him feel a bit ill. So, this was what America was trying to tell him… and he had taken it all personally out of *fear*.

"*Thank you very much friend, this makes sense to me. Have nice day today! :)"*

"You're welcome~! I'm glad I could help amico~!"

Ivan hung his head… deciding that if America did call him today he would apologize, it would be hard to be letting America out of his site, the short time gratification of seeing him healthy and having him close… not worth losing him in the long run. Now that he understood what he was doing wrong, he would make new 'game plan'.

After a nice slow wakeup morning filled with calm chatting and helping out his friend. Italy felt like he was finally calm enough to call his brother. He kissed Ludwig on the cheek who had decided it was vacuuming day and headed outside onto the back porch.

He half wasn't sure if Romano would pick up, something about 'who the hell just CALLS people these days?' but he didn't quite get it, who *didn't* like a nice chat on the phone*?

He leaned on the railing as the phone rang. He looked at his nails, he'd have to file them down again, he normally clipped them anyway, but now that he had a partner he wanted to make extra sure he kept them short.

He also totally wasn't distracting his brain because he was mentally preparing himself to talk to his brother.

Geeze, was that bad that it felt like such an ordeal to him?

He kicked himself lightly in the back of the leg, what a way to think about your own brother!

“What the hell do you want testa di salsiccia?!”

Feli rolled his eyes at being called ‘sausage head’.

“Romanoooo I was calling to talk and make up after that fight!” He complained.

Romano grumbled.

“Umm... besides I guess siblings aren’t supposed to fight like that...” Feli said, immediatly loosing confidence. “Gilbert and Lulu don’t fight like that! Neither do Matthew and Alfred!!”

“None of them have an airheaded little brother that seriously gets on the nerves!” Romano bit back.

Feli grimaced slightly.

“Romano why do you have to be so mean?!”

“Why do you have to be such a dumbass?!”

Feli let out a long breath through his nose.

“Look... Roma, I’m sorry, I know you’ve had it super tough, and I didn’t mean to give you the impression I didn’t care or wanted to act like I’m the ‘only’ Italy...” He tried to say, only to be met with dead air, he would have thought he got hung up on if he didn’t hear some faint rustling.

“...It’s not fair though... you know? We were both just little bambinos... It’s not my fault we were pit against each other... I didn’t do all those mean things to you! That was grown up countries that just did it because they could!”

“...I know that... stupid...” Romano said quietly, sounding like he was drinking something.

“But you’re not totally innocent you know! You put on a front all the time! And even if you don’t think you are you still act like you’re better than me!” Romano bit back after a second.

Feliciano hung his head in frustration. “*How??* I’m not meaning to..!”

“I don’t care what you ‘*meant’*, It’s written all over you! When you actually get mad and show an emotion other than ‘ditzy-carefree dumbass’ for five seconds, you panic because you worry you’ll sound like *me*! Your completely dishonest all the damn time but *everyone* believes you because your mister innocent over there unlike ‘mean old romano’.”

Feliciano mumbled to himself incoherently and pulled at his shirt collar, suddenly finding it too tight.

He supposed there was some truth to it... even if he hadn't intended it... he did get worried about when he got upset or wasn't acting positive that people might think he was being too much like his brother... because he didn't like being or appearing negative.

When had that started?

Maybe it was a lesson that he learned when he was small that hiding how he really felt and acting innocent got him doted on, while Romano's honesty that he wasn't happy and hated the way he was treated got him in more trouble.

It was a bad lesson.

But how do you unlearn something like that?

"...I'm sorry Roma... I think I understand now. But... I swear its not because I think less of you as a person... I think, I think its just because I saw things get harder for you, and I at least sort of got left alone if I acted sweet... not to mention... I didn't... I didn't want to be a regular warring nation and end up like grandpa either..." Feli said, despratly trying to communicate, despite already feeling like he wanted to run away and hide from such a serious topic.

"Dammit... ... I guess its not like its all your fault. We were super pitted against each other, huh? We didn't ever choose that crapola." Romano said with a sigh. "It's almost satisfying to see you get mad though because it feels like your actually being honest for once."

"I hadn't thought of it like that..." Feliciano responded. "Are you totally honest with you acting aggressive all the time though?" He asked.

"Tch.... I guess not. What a messy pair we make."

Feli laughed a little bit. "Si... your right. Maybe being dramatic runs in the familly."

"You're the *more* dramatic one though." Romano teased.

"Hehe, you're probably right... I am super dramatic."

"...Sorry I gave you hell for the America thing and was a *little* hypocritical, but to my credit America was a lot weaker back then... and it was a bluff."

Feli hummed. "To be fair, I didn't really intend to like... *fist fight* him... just like... intimidate him... which is just as silly but..."

"What do you think it is about America?"

"Hmm... maybe we both kind of wanted to seem impressive to him deep down too?" Feli suggested.

"...You might be onto something."

They both laughed, and Feli slowly began feeling a little better. He felt like he wanted to think more on perhaps being dishonest about his feelings, maybe being so scared of

negativity did more harm than good... but for now he had another more pressing matter on his mind.

“Romano... I have a question though... even though we’re not as close as we could be... if you... if you were sick or not doing well, you would tell me, right?” Feli asked nervously.

“Eh? Where the hell did that come from? But yeah, Probably i’d make sure you’d never hear the end of it.” Romano joked.

Feli smiled a little bit. “Okay good... your still feeling closely connected to your land and people and everything? You’re still healing fast?”

“Yeah... seriously though, why are you suddenly so worried?”

“Hmm... Romano, you have to promise to keep this to yourself for now... okay? If you spill the beans I’ll never forgive you for real!”

“Alright alright, I won’t say whatever it is, I swear.”

Satisfied, Feli took a deep breath, lowering his voice. “It’s because... Gilbert is fading, I think... I think he might dissolve soon.”

“Eh? That other potato bastard is fading? I thought he was supposed to be East G... *Oh*, alright now I see why you got all worried I might have the same problem...”

Feli nodded before remembering his brother couldn’t see him nod. “Si... I’m not sure why its different, but I’m releived to hear your okay!”

Romano hummed thoughtfully. “Maybe that bastard is still too attached to his old identity, you know I think England wasn’t just sick during the war, I remember America saying that scone-y bastard got all sick when he was still clinging to being an empire despite a lot of his colonies finally getting the hell away from him.”

“Oh I wonder...” Feli said, thinking it over curiously.

He didn’t like the idea of talking to England, but maybe that could help with this puzzle... maybe Gilbert really could recover.

“It’s just a thought... but I don’t know, I feel like my identity and the fact that I’m attached to you is *generally balanced* these days... could be better though...”

“Hmm yes, I understand... Thank you so much Romano... I’m glad you picked up!”

Romano huffed in response. “Yeah whatever, dumbass...” He said, now more teasing than actually mad.

“Lets get gelato or something soon, okay? I’ll be back home sometime this week!”

“Better be damn good gelato...”

“It’s our place Roma! Of course it will be!” He cheered.

“Heh, you got me there.”

They said their goodbyes and Italy took in a deep breath as the light breeze found its way accross his face and through his hair as some of the anxiousness left him.

He definitly had a lot to think about now though, what a crazy time these past few days had been. Going inside, he saw Ludwig pulling a couch back into place from vacuuming under it.

“Hmm... did you find that spot where I spilled that sauce yet?” Feli asked teasingly.

“*No*, and it’s driving me insane.” Ludwig grumbled, hands on his hips.

“Maybe I just did a really good job cleaning it up in a panic!” Feli said with a grin.

Ludwig squinted at him and shook his head. “How is it you only seem to do things like that competently when your *panicking*?”

“Adrenaline does amazing things!”

Ludwig ‘harrumphed’ but came over and kissed the top of his head regardless.

“Did your talk with your brother go well?”

“Yeah... we made up... though...” Feli raised his eyebrows and looked at Ludwig seriously. “Luddy, do you feel like I’ve ever been dishonest when it comes to bad things?”

Ludwig tilted his head, thinking over the question, seriously. “Well... you certainly tend to avoid certain subjects and prefer seeing a silver lining when it comes to most things... It’s not like I don’t understand that inclination though.”

Leave it to Germany to give him a straightforward and sincere answer like that. Feliciano thought it over, he realized there wasn’t a lot about the darker things he experienced he had *ever* talked about... and he did kind of avoid scary topics, didn’t he?

“Hmmm... maybe that’s not super good... it’s scary though, I’m supposed to be a pretty sunny happy country.” Feli said absentmindedly.

“I think you’re putting too much pressure on yourself.” Ludwig said sincerely. “Even you get cloudy days, you need the rain too otherwise all those beautiful vineyards and landscapes in your country would have a hard time if they existed at all.”

Feli blinked a few times. “I never thought of it like that...” He kissed Ludwig’s nose before pulling him into a hug. “Thank you LuLu... you’re so smart.”

“So are you, dumbkoff.”

Feli giggled. “That sentance doesn’t really make sense, but thank you Orsetto.”

Ludwig snuggled him close, and Feli sighed and melted into him. He felt like the luckiest man in the world in that very moment, and felt like it could only go up from here despite everything... but he'd try to be better at giving the hard times some honest attention too.

Chapter End Notes

*Can't agree with Feli - I'm on Romano's side, who the hell willingly just... calls someone like that? Like, you gotta warn me, I gotta be mentally prepared to talk to someone on the phone. The introvert in me can't just DO that looool.

What will it take?

Chapter Summary

Ivan and Alfred talk it out...
... and Detective Italy is on the case to help Prussia

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alfred woke up with a groan around noon. His head was feeling fuzzy, but his headache was barely there now after a good nights sleep in total darkness.

He rolled over, used to his arm flopping on top of Ivan these days, and groaned as he remembered the events of the previous day. He was already missing his warm Russian to cuddle with despite having been annoyed.

Gah, maybe if he hadn't had that damn headache…

Though double Gah, maybe it was still good that he said some of that stuff?

But TRIPLE GAH, he still felt mean.

He rolled out of bed, almost thumping onto the floor because his legs didn't work as fast as he had hoped and went to take a shower to shake the last bits of sleep from his eyes so he could go get coffee to get the fluff out of his brain.

Once he finally had coffee stimulating his brain stem, he fell back on his couch and quickly called Ivan, tapping his fingers on the edge of the couch anxiously as he waited for Russia to pick up.

"Hello little one, you have called earlier than I expected…"

Alfred felt almost relieved to hear that sweet Russian voice that was thank fuck, not mad or anything.

"Hey big guy… Yeah… I guess I was missing you this morning…" He confessed, pulling a couch cushion close to his chest and hugging it.

"I was missing you too sunflower!"

Alfred sighed and smiled, that nickname still made his heart flutter.

Then Ivan asked. "Even so, ah… … do you still want alone time today?"

Alfred fiddled with the corner of the couch pillow. He was confused with himself. This whole week he had been like ‘ugh Ivan’s all over me’, but now Ivan was just gone for one night and already he’s all anxious he’ll never come back? Even though this convo on its own shows he will? But still…

Alfred covered his eyes. Maybe they just had to find the right balance.

“Nah… I’m kind of cold without you.”

“Ah, I definitely can’t let мое солнышк* get cold. I have to finish some work for my boss then I will come see you!”

“Alright, see ya in a bit babe! Don’t let your boss be too hard on you or I’ll have no choice but to come rescue you!”

Ivan snorted. “I will keep this in mind. I will see you later Fredya. Oh! Remember to water your plants in the backyard today, they were looking a bit sad.”

Once they hung up, Alfred stood immediately at the reminder. Damn he was so bad at keeping plants alive and remembering when to water them. It’d be nice to be out in the sun for a bit though.

When Alfred got the text from Ivan he was on his way Alfred felt several more waves of relief. Maybe he should change into shorts… totally not because he was going to be trying to tease his boyfriend or nothin’, it was just hot.

He half tried to imagine Ivan wearing less layers, or maybe a short-sleeved shirt, but despite having seen Ivan with nothing on plenty of times now, he just couldn’t picture it. How did Ivan not get overheated??

He paced around, trying to continue to figure out his own feelings. He’d always had trouble with stuff like this. He felt at odds with himself, wanting freedom and independence… but also having separation anxiety. He wanted to be his own thing, but he also got lonely. They’d talk it out, maybe it was partially his fault for not communicating he needed a little more space before it got to the point where Alfred had been in a bad mood and blown up a little.

When he heard the front door open, he went flying down the hall in a quick sprint. Ivan panicked as he leapt into the giant Russian man’s arms, and Alfred immediately nuzzled into Ivan’s neck now that Ivan had quickly grabbed him to hold him up and Alfred had his legs securely wrapped around the Russian’s waist.

Ivan fumbled with the door to close it before re-adjusting his grip.

“I thought at first you were running at me for an attack! I suppose this is nicer kind of attack…”

Alfred immediately kissed Ivan’s nose and then his lips.

“I’m… I’m glad your back.” Alfred said, catching his breath and calming down a little.

Ivan hummed and carried Alfred to the living room, sitting down with Alfred still around him and letting the smaller man adjust to sit in his lap more comfortably.

“I am glad to be back little one… though we should talk maybe?”

Alfred nodded and sighed. “I’m… I’m sorry for snapping yesterday, and I was in a bad mood and…

“No. I was being over-bearing. I understand now. I was letting fear of loosing you getting the best of me…I’m sorry sunflower.”

Alfred furrowed his brows. “You know I’m not going anywhere, right??” Alfred said, playing with a bit of Ivan’s platinum hair.

“I know… in theory…” Ivan said sadly.

Alfred sighed. “I can’t act like I don’t know the feeling.” He rubbed the back of his neck. “Look… obviously I got really anxious this morning with you not being there, even though I’m the one that asked for space… I know its gotta be super confusing, and I’m kind of confused at myself…”

Ivan tilted his head thoughtfully before nodding honestly. “Yes I… I do not understand relationships to begin with, I have ah… never gotten this far before…”

Alfred bit his lip slightly and moved from fiddling with Ivan’s hair to his scarf. “I guess… ugh, I mean I guess you waiting for me for meetings was sweet sometimes, but sometimes it felt a little too much… You keeping an arm on me around others was cute… but sometimes it can feel a little possessive…” Alfred shook his head. “I don’t know man. I also should have said something earlier, like, in the actual moments when it felt like too much.”

Alfred sighed as Ivan pet his head slightly as he thought over what Alfred just said.

“Perhaps this is something that must be figured out actively? Now we know it is possible problem? I think we are quite the worrying confused pair!”

Alfred chuckled a little bit, leaning against Ivan more and resting his head against his shoulder. “Yeah… I think you’re right… I’ll try and speak up more if I need space.”

Ivan rubbed his back. “I will try and pick up on when you are getting uncomfortable better, yes? I will also try not to worry, I know you are very strong and capable, despite how some part of me does try to convince me you will somehow vanish regardless of what I know as a fact…”

“I get it babe… I really do.” Alfred said squeezing Ivan a little tighter. “Lets just… do our best to live in the present and not worry so much about what ‘could’ happen, okay?”

“I will try my best.” Ivan said honestly.

Alfred smiled and relaxed fully into Ivan, feeling at ease. Though, while he usually appreciated Ivan’s warmth and his tendency to wear really soft sweaters, it was something

like 90+ degrees freakin' Fahrenheit outside.

"ugh, god dude why do you have to wear so many *layers*, its h o t" Alfred complained.

"I am not sure, it is habit I suppose." Ivan said honestly.

"Well, we gotta break that habit. Especially now you're with me so much!"

"Hmm… I suppose it does seem like it would be impossible to freeze around you, even in sub-zero temperatures!" Ivan said with a small little smile.

Alfred beamed proudly and squirmed a little bit as Ivan's hand somehow ended up rubbing part of his bare leg. The shorts *had* been a good idea it seemed.

Ludwig sighed; his brother's condition hadn't improved… but it hadn't worsened at least. He came out of Gilbert's room and went upstairs to the dining room to find Feliciano writing in a notebook with his legs crossed. Espresso that he had made himself half drunk beside him, head in his hands as he tapped the page with his pencil, looking oddly focused and thoughtful.

Ludwig paused, leaning against the doorframe, unable to help admiring the scene before him, especially with the way the early morning golden light sprinkled in through the window and seemed to just make Italy's sun-kissed skin and auburn hair light up even more.

He hadn't necessarily gotten Italy's random moments of wanting to draw or paint someone before… but suddenly Ludwig understood as he gazed at him here, wishing for a moment he did have the artistic ability to capture such a thing.

Instead, he quietly took a picture with his phone since Italy seemingly hadn't noticed him yet. He didn't feel like the phone properly captured the light and feeling as well as he would have wanted, but it was good enough.

He finally walked over to sit across from Feli at the table, making his presence known and smiled a little at the way Italy perked up, his curl seemingly perking up even more, as if a piece of hair could even do that.

"Hey LuLu! How's your brother doing?" He asked sincerely.

"About the same, his cough doesn't sound as bad… but I don't know if that means anything…" Ludwig said honestly.

Feli looked at him with soft wide eyes of concern, humming as he looked back down at his notebook.

"What are you working on?" Ludwig asked curiously.

"Well…" Feli began sheepishly. "I really want to try and help with you and your big brother, so I'm trying really hard to keep track of everything I know and maybe people we could get

information from!" he announced, showing Germany his notes.

Ludwig looked at the book curiously, taking note of how loopy and fancy even Italy's quick style of writing was. Italy? Strategizing? Investigating?

"You're going to this much trouble?" Ludwig found himself saying as he began looking over what had been written down so far.

"Of course, Germany! If I can help and… and somehow help Gilbert, I want to… He's your big brother and a good friend! Besides, maybe he'll be my future brother-in-law, I want him to be around for a long time so he can see that…"

Ludwig sputtered and blushed at the part about 'future brother-in-law', the thought of him and Italy… being married… he suddenly felt really warm.

"J-Ja, that's true…" He said, face now fully red as he turned his focus back to the page before him.

Italy's notes:

1. *Romano is fine – connected to land and people despite sometimes being forgotten now we're unified. :(*
2. *England really ill from being too stubborn about loosing his 'empire'? – Ask America and England himself about it?*
3. *Has anyone ever even called Gilbert 'East' or 'East Germany' outside of Lulu? Even Romano will sometimes call himself 'South Italy' Even though he kind of hates it and hates it when others call him that or think he's me. Has Gilbert ever called himself 'East'?*
4. *England likes bragging about having 'ruled the world' but he doesn't call himself 'the British empire' anymore – is that important?*
5. *Could a country accidently cause themselves to dissolve if they're too attached to what they used to be?*

Germany leaned forward thoughtfully at Italy's notes, seeing the train of thought, and wondering if there was anything to it. Come to think of it, he *hadn't* heard Gilbert ever call himself 'East' or anything of the sort, maybe he didn't *actually* feel connected to the eastern half of the country… or was too stubborn currently to think of himself as anything but 'Prussia'… but Gilbert's name had changed from the Teutonic Knights, hadn't it? If he could change once, what was the problem now? Had it not been a problem when Gilbert was younger?

Maybe it was worth cluing Alfred in, he had wanted to tell him as a friend anyway, especially considering his brother had such a heavy hand in helping America with his independence - and if England had gotten deathly sick before…

"I think you may be onto something…" Germany finally said.

Italy perked up. “You think so? I wasn’t sure if maybe I was seeing something where there isn’t anything…”

“Nein, I feel like this is plausible, we just need to get more information.” Germany said with a determined nod as he handed Italy back his notebook. “Its… much more of a lead than I had, certainly.”

He stood and ruffled Italy’s hair affectionately. “Detective Italy… that sort of thoughtfulness is a good look on you. I feel like calling you an airhead might be inaccurate now.” He teased.

“Hehe! Wow! If you think so Germany, maybe I *do* have some brains in me I can put to good use.”

“Ja, I think you absolutely do.” He praised, getting out his phone.

“I’ll contact America first, and we can see what he witnessed as an outsider to England’s sickness, then we can talk to England himself.” Germany said, already going into action.

“Si! Si! I think that’s a good idea Germany! There’s no time to loose! Oh! If we’re going to see America I’ll go pack some of our leftovers for him, I bet he’d like that!”

Ludwig nodded with a small smile. “He’d *love* that.” He encouraged as Italy ran off into the kitchen, pausing and going back to grab his espresso cup and down the rest of it on his way.

Ludwig began his message to Alfred:

“America, do you have time to meet today? There’s something important I need to tell you and ask you on a personal level.”

Alfred was quick to text back as always, that was one thing he was rather reliable about.

“*Shit dude, everything okay?”*

“Well… not really… it’s about my brother, its serious. Me and Italy are trying to ask around for answers… I will say though, I’ll have to ask you to talk about England, I’ll understand if you wouldn’t like doing that.” Ludwig answered honestly.

“Damn, okay, yeah, I can meet up with ya – and don’t worry, Me and Iggy are on tentatively better terms now, and even if not I don’t mind if it means I can help somehow! Where u wanna meet dude?”

“Let’s meet at that Café you dragged me to. I want to try their red velvet cake anyway, and the atmosphere was nice. Italy is coming too, he’s packing some extra food we have for you as thanks as well.”

“Sure thing! – And aw man! Thank you!!! I can’t wait! <3”

Ludwig sighed and went into the kitchen to find Feli.

“Alright, America is going to meet up with us.”

Feli had just finished carefully putting everything into a bag. “Oh good! I’m glad!”

Ludwig nodded, taking a deep breath. He didn’t want to get his hopes up… but if somehow… they could make sure his brother’s state was brief and he’d recover fully and be a healthy representation of East Germany… he’d do just about anything to save his brother.

Italy rubbed his arm soothingly, sensing his stress. “It’s okay Lulu… we’ll figure this out.” He said reassuringly, honest and true determination in his eyes that had Ludwig really believing that may be the case.

“You’re… your right, we will. He’s… everything will be okay…” He said, mostly to himself.

“Yes, it will be! Besides, Gil has so much to stick around for to see you do, He has to see you and Alfred race, you know he’s going to want to be a best man at a *theoretical* wedding, and you two have got so much more brother bonding and activities to do! I bet if he’s given a solution, he’ll do his best to stick around!” Italy encouraged.

Ludwig gave Italy a brief kiss in agreement, feeling further soothed by his words, before getting his keys and calling downstairs to his brother. “East! We’re going out for a bit! We’ll bring you back something… and let the doggies out if you happen to get up!”

Ludwig was met by a short cough followed by a: “You got it little brother! You two love-birds have fun!”

“We… We will! I’ll see you later brother!” Ludwig called back, still feeling that melancholy weight in his heart.

Though as they headed out, he let just a little bit of hope fill him, that maybe they could find a solution… and he wouldn’t loose his big brother for good.

Chapter End Notes

* This basically means 'my sun' or 'my sunshine'!

Counting Sheep

Chapter Notes

CW for mentions of a near-character death

“I’m gonna go out for a bit and hang with Germany, we’ll be at a café, want me to bring ya back anything?” Alfred asked Ivan in a chipper voice as he pulled his shirt over his head.

“Nyet, I’ll be okay.” Ivan replied, only looking up from the book he had been reading for a second.

Alfred took a second to admire Ivan with reading glasses looking very peaceful this morning. He was so gosh darn cute it felt like a crime!

“’Kay, I’ll be back in a bit!” Alfred called, nearly forgetting both his wallet and his keys, before realizing he forgot something else… he ran back in and gave Ivan a peck on the cheek, and *then* finally got going.

He wondered what could be going on around Germany’s brother that were so serious. He had half noted the last time he saw him when they were picking out bikes, Gilbert had looked more… tired… than he remembered. He hoped maybe he was just over-thinking it, but from the little details he had gotten through text, it didn’t sound good. Something about having questions around England too?

As he sped-walked to their meeting location, he found some of those distant memories he tended to block out filtering back in.

“*What are you doing with that weak stance? And if you hold your rifle like that, that little loser is going to knock it right out of your hands!”* Gilbert had lectured him. He was harsh with his training, but he always kept an encouraging smile and made jokes here and there, praising him generously when had done well.

Alfred remembered how much his hands had hurt from callouses forming, how much his body ached – He had always been strong, strong enough to spin a buffalo above his head, but that didn’t mean the cold hadn’t stung, the rain beating down on him hadn’t soaked him to the bone, and his muscles hadn’t ached from pushing himself further and further. He wasn’t *stupid*, England was an empire, Alfred was a colony. He had his own reasons for rebelling, he’d rather be alone and make his own decisions… than… also be alone but pushed around and constantly berated and ordered around by a monarchy/boss that England did all the talking to... and he hadn’t even met.

He knew the people in his colony had their own reasons for wanting to bite back… not all of them ones he himself liked. But he began to hope if he trained hard, had the kind of confidence that Gilbert did… had the kind of likeable charm Francis had… if maybe he set a good example, maybe he'd finally be listened to, maybe it would all turn out okay, even if he had to fight Arthur as well as his own twin brother to make it happen.

Back then, Prussia, England, France, all of them had seemed so strong, like they had it all together and nothing scared them, and *no one* could order them around.

Boy… had that been naive of him. He almost wanted to laugh at how mature he thought he was back then.

"*That loser is going to knock it right out of your hands!"*

England *had* knocked his rifle right out of his hands, hadn't he? Alfred laughed at himself quietly. He had never been great at doing what he was told.

Alfred waved to both Italy and Germany as he arrived, it seemed he had gotten there just as they were.

"Wow Germany! You were right the décor out here is really pretty! I love the natural vines!" Italy chirped.

"I told you I have some sense of funk-sway..."

Alfred snorted. "Do you mean *Feng Shui*?" He asked, grinning as Ludwig turned a shade of pink in the cheeks and Feliciano stifled a giggle by covering his mouth.

"Th-That's what I said!" Germany argued despite knowing it was pointless.

"Funk Sway is like a new genre of music." Alfred countered, grin getting wider.

"Hehe! I wonder what such a thing would sound like!" Italy joined in.

Ludwig turned a deep red and turned his head away from both of them. "These sorts of words are hard for me to say! Let's just get coffee and sit *please*"

"You're the boss!" Alfred said with a pleased laugh.

"Aye Aye Captain!" Feliciano agreed.

They both shared one more little chuckle at poor Ludwig's embarrassed expense. Alfred had to say, if anyone were to rival him in the cheerful optimistic department, it was Italy.

It was a nice break of the tension, especially with knowing they'd probably be talking about something serious.

They took a moment to sit with their respective desserts, he watched curiously as Italy very carefully considered his espresso before making a small noise of contentment, he seemed to swirl drinks around in his mouth the same way France did. That was the one thing Alfred had to agree with England on not getting. He supposed it was a gourmet thing.

One time him and Arthur had bonded a bit when they managed to end up at a wine tasting with some of the other countries and they both wound up bullshitting before starting to wind each other up with complete nonsense to describe the *dimension* of the wine to each other, slowly ending up in hysterics. It was one of the few times he had seen Arthur loosen up in a 'keeping up appearances' setting and not give a damn.

"Does it meet your high standards?" Ludwig asked with a slight smirk.

"Hmm It's not bad!" Feliciano said happily in response.

"Wow, that's high praise coming from you." Ludwig commented with bemusement, taking a bit of his red velvet cake, and ironically analyzing it just as hard as Italy evaluated his espresso.

"Si, it is, they should be proud! It's not easy getting an 'okay' score from me!" Italy teased in return causing Ludwig to roll his eyes playfully.

Alfred leaned into his hand. Dang, these two hadn't been official *that* long and were already acting like an old married couple. It was kind of adorable. Though, he knew they were all dancing around why they were there.

"Soo… what's up ya'll?" Alfred asked slowly, slightly ungracefully, but… better rip the band-aid off, right?

He stirred some extra sugar into his mocha both because he liked it extra sweet and so he could do something with his hands for a second.

Ludwig cleared his throat. "You see… the thing is… my brother, he's… he's very sick." He began.

Alfred felt his stomach sink. So, he *hadn't* been totally overthinking for once. "Like… *flu* very sick or…" He said slowly, despite knowing the answer.

"Bedridden and… *dissolving* sick." Ludwig choked out, brows furrowing as he seemed to force a frustrated expression to cover a more mournful one.

Alfred bit the inside of his cheek; he could feel his chest tightening. There was no way…

"But… isn't he East Germany now? He *shouldn't* be disappearing, right?" He thought out loud.

"That's the puzzle we're trying to solve." Italy confirmed, holding Germany's hand under the table softly. "We were thinking since it sounded like England might have been really sick for a time… and you were an outside witness…" Italy said, beginning to babble faster than he meant to before slowing down and pausing.

Alfred took in a deep breath and leaned back in his seat. Yeah… that would make sense as a possible lead…

“I thought we should come to you first before England himself…” Italy finished.

Alfred nodded. “Yeah… From what it sounded like I don’t even know if he remembered all that much or how he pulled out of it.” He took a long sip from his drink. He didn’t like thinking about this kind of thing, but if it could help out… well dammit he was a hero right?!

“He was bad, for a while there, So bad I guess uh… he had what’s called a ‘death rattle’ for a bit.”

Germany tensed. “Th-that bad?”

Alfred slowly nodded. “Yeah… we were all pretty shocked, we thought maybe it’d just be a dumb little cold he’d get over quick, I even made a joke where I put a burger on his forehead because I really thought it wasn’t that big of a deal.” He admitted, half trying to break the tense mood with a small funny story from the time.

“But uh… yeah, he got so bad he just kind of stopped responding at one point…” Alfred found himself choking on his own words, damn, he hadn’t thought this would be hard for him.

“If its too difficult to talk about…” Ludwig offered.

“Nah, nah… its important…”

Alfred remembered sitting for hours with Mattie next to the bed where their former guardian had laid their unresponsive for hours, Alfred remembered all the weird feelings that had cropped up including an odd bout of irrational anger when he had wondered.

“*Is he really going to leave me alone again?!”*

Even if he knew this time it wasn’t Arthurs fault at all. He hated it, hated watching him there knowing there was nothing he could do directly, nothing to fight or punch, no way to fly in at the last second and be the hero of the day.

Now… maybe Gilbert was going through that? And there was that terrifying question if he could even make it.

“His recovery was pretty miraculous, it was like… he really seemed like he was gone for a sec there, we were already speculating if there would be a ‘new’ England, and if maybe somehow Arthur ended up being tied to the British Empire or United Kingdom, and that’s why he was falling apart, but then it was like, he shot right back up, and he was just… smelly old England.” He said with a joking huff. “I asked him if he saw a light at the end of the tunnel or something, and he said something weird about how he had just been hanging with some sheep, it was weird.” Alfred said, trying to think out loud.

“Its super wild because I think I kind of expected Ivan to get a similar kind of sick when the whole U.S.S.R thing was going down, but I don’t know, he was just “Russia” pretty quick.”

He shook his head. “I swear this country stuff makes no sense…” He rambled.

“Hmm, there’s lots of sheep in England’s country-side! Maybe while he was out, he was able to feel reconnected with his land!” Italy suggested. “And with Russia, he’s probably used to things changing a lot for him, so maybe he’s already found something that makes it not hard for him.”

“Huh, I hadn’t thought of it like that, but it makes sense.” Alfred agreed.

He had dismissed the sheep thing before thinking it was just England being weird, but he was sure glad he mentioned it.

“So… you think maybe Gilbert hasn’t adjusted to being East Germany enough to not *dissolve?*” Alfred asked worriedly.

Ludwig drew his finger around the rim of his cup, looking down into it as if it’d have some sort of comfort or answers within it.

“My brother has always been stubborn, he was reluctant to have us share in the way we have, not because he doesn’t want us to be unified, or because he doesn’t want to share a house with me, but when we were unifying he… he was obsessed with the idea he’d somehow be a drain, tried to argue nonsense about just finding new territory, he refused to let me help.” Ludwig began becoming more frustrated with each word. “While I managed to eventually convince him, the past few years still…”

Alfred and Feliciano locked eyes, seemingly having the same thought.

So that was it… potentially… Gilbert somewhere within himself was still refusing to share the same piece of land with his little brother.

“That’s the difference then… Germany, Fratello is stubborn in a different way, he’s stubborn in the sense that he’d be damned if he were ever to give up his connection to his country. England would have to have been too stubborn to let himself dissolve even if he was struggling with his identity, and Russia isn’t stubborn about that at all. Your brother… he’s got nothing to his own name, and somewhere he must still think..!”

Ludwig’s knuckles turned a bit white. “…he must still think he’s taking something away from me… dammit brother, don’t you realize that I…” He began before gritting his teeth.

Alfred carefully reached out and patted Germany’s shoulder. “We can do dumb, confusing things for family… but hey, now you know what’s happening, maybe there’s a way to break down that stubborn barrier!” He encouraged.

“I worried about how on any level he could think I’d somehow be better without him… he’s always been so confident and boastful, but maybe he’s just been trying to protect me this whole time, maybe I should have been more worried…” Ludwig said, furrowing his brows, beginning to guilt himself. Alfred had to put a stop to his buddy going down that road *quick.*

“Hey, dude, you can only do so much when you only have part of the picture.” Alfred tried to encourage.

“He’s right Lulu! You couldn’t have known.” Feli agreed, leaning into his partner, and squeezing his hand a little tighter. “And now we might be able to find a solution.”

Ludwig finally untensed again, closing his eyes briefly to calm himself. “You’re both right.” He looked up and met Alfred’s eyes finally and smiled softly. “Thank you for all your help, even though I know it’s a difficult topic for all of us…. And thank you for being my friend too”

Alfred turned a little pink as Feli looked at Germany starry eyed. “Awww Lulu…” He swooned.

“Ahehe… I mean, yeah, of course dude!” Alfred responded, unable to help a big grin knowing he really did something to help out, and that Ludwig was really happy they were friends now. “What are friends for, right?”

Alfred was secured with leftover food as promised, and they said their goodbyes. Alfred took his time walking home, hoping maybe their conversation really meant maybe a life could be saved. He also smiled to himself, happy that he really had made a good friend.

He thought over the memories he had to recall earlier, wincing slightly as that horrible labored breathing sound seemed to enter his mind and caused him to shiver despite it being warm outside. Without thinking he took his phone out of his pocket, and was calling Arthur before he really had time to realize it.

It didn’t take long for England to pick up, it never seemed to take past 3 rings these days.

“*Alfred? Are you alright?”* He heard Arthur ask, followed by what sounded like him drinking something.

Oh right, it was about afternoon tea time for him, wasn’t it.

“Hey Eng…” Alfred began, what the hell was he even calling to say?? “Yea, I’m alright, I was just out with Germany and Italy. Um… …. Are you alright?” He found himself asking.

“*...well yes, I’m quite alright.”* Arthur replied in surprise.

Great, now there was an awkward silence. Alfred coughed a few times. “Um, well, I was thinking its been a while since we’ve hung out, and hey! Now that I got an awesome boyfriend maybe you should come over for like… dinner, or something. Its like a *thing* for normal people to have their family come over to meet their partner, right? I mean, haha, you know who Ivan is, like obviously but um, like, you get me right?” He rambled, heart pounding away in his chest. What a lame look for the hero to have dammit!

“I-I wouldn’t mind that at all!!” England responded, seemingly getting embarrassed by his own enthusiasm. “*Er that is to say, I’m sure I’d be delighted, of course.”*

“Great! I’ll talk to Ivan so we can set something up, ‘kay?” He responded.

When was the last time he had actually been excited to hang with England? Maybe things really were going to be different. He didn’t want to get ahead of himself, but… still.

“*Very well, just let me know when you want to and I’ll make time for it, alright?”*

Alfred didn’t quite know how to put into words how much “I’ll make time” meant to him, so he just grinned a little wider and kept it to himself.

“M’kay, thanks Eng! I’ll talk to you later!”

“*Have a good day Alfred, talk soon.”*

“A-And hey… Artie?”

“*...yes?”*

“Um… I’m, I’m really glad your around, just saying, ‘kay! Bye!”

He hung up leaving England in stunned silence. Panicking that he had really said that out loud, only for his worries to be quashed when he saw one more text from England.

“*I’m glad your around too. I’m going to do my best to make up for lost time – thank you for giving this old fool another chance.”*

America wound up holding his phone to his chest for a second before putting it back in his pocket.

They lived long lives, filled with war, civil unrest, infighting, and misery. Sometimes it was so hard to deal with, hard to balance your own needs and figure out where you end, and your country began. Yet at the same time they also were beginning to have each other more than they had in past, the joyful and fun moments over time combating all the *crap* they had to put up with. Even though things were still scary and uncertain as they changed – Alfred felt that if they all stuck together and figured it out, nothing that the world threw at them could bring them down.

When he got home, he nearly laughed as he saw Ivan peek around the corner timidly, clearly having wanted to greet him at the door but seemingly worrying that would startle him. Alfred immediately walked up and slung his arms over Ivan’s shoulders, silently leaning against him.

Ivan responded quickly and squished Alfred to him, immediately making Alfred feel relaxed and at peace.

“Did you have a good outing?” He asked softly.

“Yeah, it was a good hang and a good talk, I gotta take you there sometime.” Alfred mumbled into him.

Ivan chuckled, somehow understanding him. “да, I would like this.”

Alfred sighed and smiled into his chest. “I love you so much”

“I love you too sunflower!” Ivan responded happily.

Yeah… everything was going to be okay.

New Direction

Chapter Summary

Ludwig finally has a more serious talk with his brother, but will words alone be enough?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I'm not going to make it… am I?

Gilbert paused for a long moment, finding himself unable to turn and look at his bedridden little brother. Sometimes it was hard anyway to look at him, to see those scars that ran up and down his body, still struggling to fully heal and disappear like they would on most growing countries. He felt angry he had ever let his sibling out of his sight in the first place. It made him want to wring France's neck, kick Hungary and Austria around a bit for letting Holy Rome out of their sight… even if he knew all three of them didn't exactly have a choice or say in the matter.

Now here little Ludwig sat, labored breathing, weak, sleeping through most of the day. A nameless child country that may not hold together. Unification was… difficult, keeping others from taking a chunk out of him, even more difficult. Sometimes Gilbert thought they were all like vultures, waiting for a weaker country to fall apart so they could pick up whatever scraps were left. He included himself and his bosses in that sentiment as well. He felt like a rabid dog in this fight to conquer, grow empires, exploit, pillage, destroy. He could be as confident outwardly as he wanted, but at the same time the fight exhausted him, the restrictive society, the constant ***death****, the will of whatever human happened to govern over him at any given time. The never-ending battle to exist…*

He couldn't let Ludwig see that he was scared. He couldn't let anyone know…

He didn't have any fucking idea what he was doing.

All he was doing was clinging desperately to keeping his brother alive. His little brother felt like the last little bit of light in his life… and he couldn't let it fade into whatever dark-ridden hell this world sometimes felt like. Maybe he was putting this one small child up on a pedestal but… anyone with a soul would want to do anything protect a small child and save them from agony, right?

He finally turned from the window when he felt he had composed himself.

"You may feel bad now, but one day you're going to get big and strong, just watch! You'll be able to kick anyone's butt! Well… maybe not mine, but close enough."

“What if I’ll always be too weak and small Bruder?” Ludwig asked, wide blue eyes becoming wet.

He was scared, and all Gilbert could do was thank whatever higher power there was up there that Ludwig didn’t remember that far back, because maybe it was a blessing in disguise.

Gilbert moved over and sat on the edge of the bed. “Even if you don’t get strong, I’ll always be around to protect you as long as you need me. The awesome me will never let anything bad happen to you! I promise.”

Ludwig stared up at him, nodding slowly like he was trying to put on a brave face. He quietly tugged at Gilbert’s sleeve with his small hand, as he often tended to do when he wanted to silently ask for comfort.

Gilbert pulled his frail little brother into his arms, holding him carefully but tightly. Ludwig buried his head in his big brother’s chest, closing his eyes and accepting the momentary comfort.

Whatever it took… he was going to save him, he wasn’t going to lose him, not now, not ever again.

Ludwig was deep in thought as he walked along the cobblestone path with Feli. Their hands interlocked being a source of continuing comfort. He felt guilty, because he half felt like he wanted to throw wild accusations at his brother about doing this on purpose, but he knew that wasn’t the case.

You couldn’t always control how you felt deep down.

Unfortunately, it seemed burying their real feelings was something that ran in the family. Consciously or not… he felt like something inside his older brother was almost…

Giving up.

When they reached his door, Ludwig took a deep breath as he took out his house key. Feli reached out, putting his other hand over his, pausing him for just a second. Ludwig turned, giving the Italian his attention.

Feli softly kissed his cheek before pulling him into a hug.

“It’s going to be okay Tesoro, and I’ll be right here if you need me after you talk to your brother.”

Ludwig squeezed him tight to him, letting that warmth that constantly seemed to follow this man soothe him.

“Thank you Feli.” He responded, gratitude clear in his voice.

He relaxed his shoulders a bit, letting out a long sigh he didn't know he'd been keeping in. "I love you, thank you for being here for me."

"I love you too Luddy!" Feli responded, gently squeezing his German a little tighter before letting go. "I'll *always* be here for you no matter what! I promise."

Ludwig hummed gratefully, heart feeling warm, as he finally opened the door.

As soon as they were in he began to further mentally preparing himself to talk to his brother. He already struggled himself with talking about certain subjects, but with his older brother, sometimes it felt harder, since Gilbert tended to deflect from serious topics by not taking *anything* seriously.

Feli gave him one more encouraging, brief, squeeze of his waist before running upstairs to get settled and let Ludwig and Gilbert have even more room to talk.

Ludwig began stalking down into Gilbert's basement, he didn't really get why Gilbert insisted on staying down there when they had a perfectly good bedroom on the first floor that actually got some *light*.

"Bruder! Me and Italy are back, you better still be in bed." He lectured.

He rolled his eyes as he heard some quick shuffling while he approached his brother's room. As soon as he walked in, Gilbert was sitting up in bed, looking sheepish and likely hoping Ludwig wouldn't notice the obvious signs that he had been moving around the room and been up at his computer.

"Eyyy welcome back West, you can bet your big brother hasn't moved an inch!"

Ludwig crossed his arms. " 'not an inch'? Hmm?"

Gilbert shifted, eyes darting to the side. "Nope."

"You're a terrible liar East." Ludwig said bluntly, moving to sit on the edge of the bed to continue talking.

Gilbert huffed and hung his head. "Can you blame me West? I can't stand sitting still all day."

Ludwig grumbled. "I suppose as long as you don't over-exert yourself…"

"This coming from the guy I had to spend an hour telling not to go out jogging while you're sick, not but only 70 years ago, Mr. Over-achiever." Gilbert countered.

Ludwig felt his face go a little warm. "I wasn't *that* sick, and exercise is important!"

Gilbert grinned wider. "Oh suuuuuuure, that's why you walked into a wall immediately after making that exact same excuse back then! Admit it West, your just as stubborn if not *more* stubborn."

"…fine, your right I'm stubborn…" He mumbled.

Gilbert seemed satisfied with his small victory; Ludwig almost hated to kill his mood.

“Anyway… Bruder, how are you feeling?” He asked hesitantly.

Gilbert shrugged. “Like shitze, but what are you gonna do?” He brushed off non-chelauntly.

Ludwig swallowed hard, looking down at his feet.

“…Bruder… you… I…” He stammered.

Gilbert looked at him quizzically as Ludwig tried and failed to speak. Ludwig pinched his nose and inhaled deeply. Why did words suddenly seem so difficult to say when it came to *actually* saying them at the worst times?

“…Bruder, you know I care about you, a lot… right?” He said nervously.

“Pfft… geeze West, what’s with the serious sentiments all of the sudden? Just cause I’m a little sick doesn’t mean I’m going to spontaneously combust!” Gilbert tried to laugh off.

Ludwig clenched his fists. “Bruder! Stop it, you know as well as I do something is wrong when a country gets as sick as you are!”

Gilbert stared at him a little taken aback, before rubbing his neck and looking away.

“…Look, West, Er… I know…” this time Gilbert was the one stammering. “I care about you too, you’re my cute little brother after all...”

Gilbert was suddenly fidgeting and looking anywhere but at his brother. “…I’m not trying to act as if this isn’t hard on you, but… I don’t know West, maybe it’s just… time for me… ya know? Maybe I’ve already done all that I was here to do.”

Despite Gilbert’s words of seemingly resolution, Ludwig could see the fear in his eyes that couldn’t be completely covered by his brother trying to put on a brave face.

Ludwig felt a little shaky at his brother’s words as well. His concerns had not been unfounded, clearly. How could Gilbert even pretend to be that resolved?? How could his brother… how could *his brother* give up like that?

“I’m an irrelevant and out of touch old nation, I’m not *needed* anymore, it might just be my time to fade to make way for the future. That’s… normal, ‘circle of life’ or whatever.” Gilbert tried to say.

Ludwig felt like each word was another arrow in his chest.

“N-Nein, bru-bruder that’s not true…” Ludwig choked out, starting to feel emotional again.

“West…”

“Nein!” Ludwig snapped back, leaping forward and wrapping his arms around his brother, putting his head into his chest not unlike he used to do as a little kid. Though of course now

as an adult he accidently knocked a bit of the wind out of his brother without meaning to.

“Bruder you’re wrong! You *are* needed. I.. I need you!”

“Kleiner Bruder... Mein liebes Kind.“ Gilbert lightly put a weak hand on his brother’s head. “You’ll be fine without me. You‘re a strong country now yeah?“

“Just because I’m strong… just because I’m grown up… just because I’m able to function without your guidance doesn’t mean I don’t *need* you Bruder.” Ludwig insisted. “I need you to be here, I need my brother because I love you, isn’t that enough of a reason? Because you want your family to be there in your life?”

Gilbert seemed to fall into a stunned silence.

Ludwig slowly sat back up, looking his brother in the eye to communicate every ounce of truthful sincerity he had in him.

“And as for being out of touch… if you really think that you’re an idiot, you pick up new technology quick, for a stubborn old jackass you’ve caught up to more modern and liberal values and thinking, you’re not stubborn where it counts. You fit in fine with modern countries… all that’s left is for you to let go of the past. I know you have a sort of nostalgia for the kind of battles you used to be in, because maybe that’s what you did for so long you don’t know what to do anymore without that sort of assignment. I know you had a lot of your value tied to that too, but your good at things now and still have plenty to offer. Besides, learning from the past is how we prevent tragedy in the future.”

Gilbert seemed to swallow hard as he tried to think of what to say. “Geeze… that kind of talk is going to get me all emotional.” He rubbed at his eyes with his arm as he looked away. “You really think all that?”

“Of course, I do Bruder, because it’s the *truth*.” He insisted.

Gilbert looked at him again after a second of trying to make himself not look weepy.

“I guess my wisdom is pretty handy huh?” Gilbert teased with a lopsided grin.

Ludwig snorted. “Ja, it is. Besides… I know we’ve had this talk before, but West Germany on its own is more than enough space for me, I think any more space would be too much more stress on me you know.”

“Hmph, It probably would give you a lot of extra work.” Gilbert mumbled.

“Yes… Yes it would… so… get better soon Bruder?” Ludwig offered.

Gilbert furrowed his brows, sighing before reaching out and ruffling his little brother’s hair. “I’ll give it my all, okay West?”

There was a certain amount of sincerity in Gilbert’s voice that put Ludwig’s mind at ease.

“Good… thank you Bruder.”

“Besides, I wouldn’t want East Germany falling apart with its “East” disappearing.” Gilbert declared with a grin.

Ludwig finally smiled. Feeling as if maybe this really was a step in the right direction.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this update took so long ya'll! I've been moving! But I'm back and in a good space! I'm aiming for the next chapter to be the end to finish this fic off!

Better than Winning

Chapter Summary

Germany and America finally race! Who will come out the winner?

Chapter Notes

Final Chapter! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Please be careful little one.” Ivan pleaded worryingly, leaning on Alfred’s prized sports car so he could look down at the blonde looking more than ready to show off his driving skills.

“Sorry Babe, danger is my middle name.” He said leaning back and flicking his shades down.

Ivan rolled his eyes. “I know for a fact it is not.” He lectured before kissing Alfred’s cheek, which immediately flushed despite his attempt to look ‘cool’.

“Just please stay in one piece да? I do not feel like picking up your mangled body parts out of metal today.”

Alfred beamed a little bit. “Alright, fair enough.”

“But *do* kick that kraut’s arse.” England chimed in.

Arthur tried to present a ‘calm’ air, but in times like this where competition was involved it was clear where Alfred got his love of adrenaline from.

“Will you hate me if I’m rooting for Germany?” Canada teased, standing just behind Arthur with kumajiro in his arms.

Alfred just narrowed his eyes behind his glasses. “You just want to suck up to his big brother, don’t you?”

“Alfred!” Mattie replied, affronted, as his face lit up.

Alfred got an especially cocky grin knowing he was absolutely right.

Ludwig readied himself on the other side of the road, while this was definitely not safe in many ways, he *had* swung it so they could make sure there were no other cars or pedestrians

that would pass through the winding road down the hill they'd be going max speed at.

"Good luck on your race Germany, I know you will do well." Japan encouraged, having just finished wishing Alfred luck as well. He had little flags for both of them, which Germany thought was sweet, and couldn't have asked Kiku to pick a side between two of his friends anyway.

"I'll do my best, thank you Japan." He agreed with a little determined nod.

"You definitely gotta beat him West! Show him the awesome power of German engineering and how much you kick ass!" His brother encouraged patting him on the back. Now standing easily and starting to look healthy again – a full month away from being at his worst point.

His cheeks and eyes were no longer sunken in and he seemed to have gained a healthy amount of his weight back, no longer seeming near death or like he'd waste away into nothing. No, instead - he was beaming, energetic and excited to watch his little brother.

Italy on the other hand hopped nervously from foot to foot, doing a little anxious sort of dance. "Please be careful Luddy! I know you're a super cool driver and everything but don't go flying off the road or something!"

"You're more likely to do that on a normal day than I am." Ludwig teased, zipping up his jacket.

He would, actually be wearing a helmet this time though.

"Hmmm I don't know Germany, there was that time you almost drove us into a river because you were too stubborn about listening to the GPS that clearly had a screw loose!" Feli hugged onto his arm protectively.

Ludwig coughed in embarrassment, and Gilbert being Gilbert just cackled. Another example of his intense rule following just getting him into trouble.

"Well luckily I don't have GPS on here, and I'll be following my gut and not any weird orders ever again I promise." He pulled Italy into a full hug and rubbed his back.

"That's my Germany." He praised, giving him and extra squeeze before leaning up close to his ear to whisper in a slightly deeper tone. "*Hey, Germany if you do an extra good job and win today, I'll give you something special okay?*"

Ludwig stared at him as he pulled away with wide blue eyes. "What... kind of special?" He asked in a hushed voice.

Feliciano just grinned and winked at him in response.

Well, that was ***some*** motivation if he had ever heard it.

"You two sicken me as usual, but since you're going to be part of the family you better beat that guy and make us all look good and be able to brag, yeah?" Romano cringed at looking at them and seemed dismissive as usual on a very surface level.

But ‘since you’re going to be part of the family’? Ludwig couldn’t help but beam a little, coming from Romano that was something akin to a peace offering and words of encouragement.

Ludwig slipped on his helmet and revved the engine of his motorcycle, looking over at Alfred who did the same, both grinning at each other in excitement.

“Sure you don’t want to back out ‘kraut’” Alfred teased, mimicking Arthur’s nickname.

“Just try and keep up ‘old man’ Ja?” Ludwig retaliated jokingly.

“Oh ho ho it is on!” Alfred laughed.

On the count of three, France waved a flag for them to start, having begged to be the one to wave a piece of fabric as fancily as he could, and the two took off down the road, leaving the cheers and ‘don’t get yourselves wreck”-s, behind them.

They sped down the hill, Alfred whooped, inner cowboy slipping out as the adrenaline hit him.

Alfred pulled ahead just by a little bit, but Ludwig couldn’t help but smirk as he readied to ruin the confidence boost by doing something he had been practicing for a while now.

Alfred turned his head slightly to the side as he realized Ludwig was smiling calmly at him from inside his helmet, as he caught up and took the lead… riding *backwards*.

“Show off.” Alfred grumbled, mostly jokingly.

Ludwig just laughed and flipped around easily while still staying ahead.

They got to a sharp curve, this is where they both knew the motorcycle would have the advantage, for the car, for safety, he’d probably have to slow way down to take it normally.

Alfred took a deep breath; he had only done this once or twice but…

He quickly ran through the steps again in his head, since he had a habit of getting things out of order. He had pulled the handbrake too quickly once and nearly flipped, but he hadn’t told Ivan that out of fear of giving him a heart attack.

He held his breath as he hit the curve, that was a *long* way down if he fucked this up, he didn’t want to hit Ludwig and put them both in a world of hurt for a few months even if it wouldn’t kill them.

He heard the telltale screeching of tires as he drifted, his instinct was to clench up and try to take control over the steering back too fast, but he held back, knowing that’s how he had almost flipped during his first attempt, and let the steering wheel lock and correct itself, only firmly stopping it to regain control and not go flying the other way.

His heart pounded away, and he was over the moon.

“Alfred! Nice!!!” Germany called to him now that they were neck and neck again due to the fact Alfred hadn’t had to slow down too much.

“I still got it!” He laughed, hiding the fact that he was more than glad that was the biggest curve on the road they had picked out.

They rushed down, neck and neck, everyone had taken the short way to the bottom both to watch them and declare the winner.

In the end though despite handling the vehicle well, Ludwig was just able to hug the curves and take them easier, they weren’t far apart when they crossed the artificial finish line, but Germany came in first. They both skidded to a stop and as soon as they did Alfred leaped out of his car, not bothering with the door, and Ludwig ripped his helmet off throwing it to the side as they both jumped at each other in a congratulatory hug, both high on adrenaline.

“That drift! Alfred!!”

“DUDE DRIVING BACKWARDS?? Sick as fuck! Congrats dude! You won fair and square.” Alfred cheered, clapping Ludwig on the back happily.

“You put up a more than good fight.” Ludwig responded.

Alfred looked at his best friend, who was grinning from ear to ear, looking bright and happy… and you know, seeing Germany like that was better than winning a race any day.

“Sunflower!” Ivan scooped Alfred up into his arms cheerfully and Alfred laughed as he was lifted up into big Russian arms and given a big kiss. “You did amazingly да? I promise to never doubt American driving skills again.”

Alfred snorted and kissed his nose. “Thanks big guy, though you know Russian driving…”

“Oh no it is terrible; I will never be bragging trust me.” Ivan teased.

“Germany! Germany! Congratulations! I knew you would win!” Feliciano cheered, leaping into Ludwig’s arms who spun him around happily.

“I never doubted you could beat burger boy for a second!” Romano lied blatantly, sticking his tongue out playfully at America who did the same back.

“Of course not.” Ludwig responded, kissing Italy on the forehead to purposefully make Romano roll his eyes.

He was then leapt on by the other side by Gilbert. “WWEEEST! I knew you could do it! That’s my cool little brother, though hey, ‘Merica, nice drift.” He praised with a little finger gun.

“Hehe! Thanks man!” Alfred beamed.

“You both did so good!” Matthew praised lifting up Kumajiro so Alfred could fist bump the little polar bear.

“Yes, that was very impressive! Wonderful job America.” England praised walking over with France nearby.

“Oui! You should have seen how excited England was seeing you do that! Incredible! To both of you! What a fun idea!” France included, nudging England teasingly who coughed a little bit.

“Really?” Alfred asked, blinking a few times, and feeling elated at both his previous guardians singing his praises. It really felt… like they were proud of him for more than just that.

“Thanks guys!” He beamed. “And hey, anyone hungry? After all that energy going through me I’m starved.”

Numerous sounds of agreement were made.

Besides, they had to celebrate the winner, right?

So, they headed off together, all laughing and talking about the day. Ludwig and Alfred gave each other another little smile of appreciation, as they walked now as close friends, surrounded by loved ones and family, joyful as they could be, now all together.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for sticking with me!~ The fic has finally wrapped up, I hope you all enjoyed! I loved writing this as I dove back into my Hetalia obsession!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!